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OR,

THE DOUBLE TRANSFORMATION
[and Tell-tale]

BY
THEOPHILE GAUTIER

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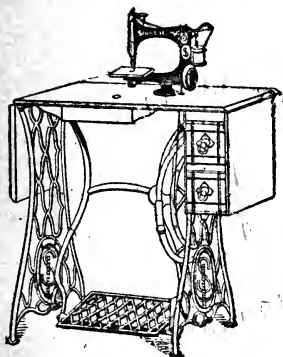
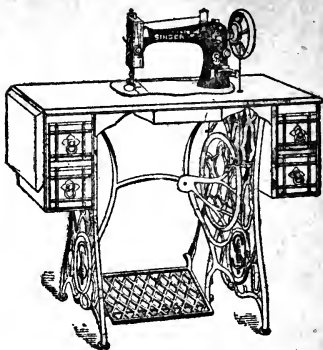
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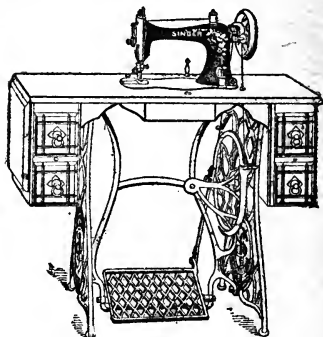
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A V A T A R ;

OR,

THE DOUBLE TRANSFORMATION.

CHAPTER I.

No one could understand the disease which was slowly undermining the constitution of Octave de Saville. He was not confined to his bed, but led his usual life, and never a complaint issued from his lips ; yet it was obvious that he was dying. He could tell the physicians, whom the anxiety of his friends had compelled him to consult, of no particular pain or suffering, and their science could discover no alarming symptoms in him. When his chest was sounded, the result was favourable ; and when the ear was applied to his heart, it could scarcely be said that its beating was either too quick or too slow. He had no cough and no fever ; but his life was evidently gliding away and taking flight through one of those invisible crevices of which man, according to the saying of Terence, is full.

Sometimes a strange faintness turned him pale and chill as a statue. For a minute or two he would seem dead ; then the pendulum of life, stayed for the moment by some mysterious hand, was let go again and resumed its oscilla-

tions, and Octave woke up as it were from a dream. He had been sent to the springs and baths, but the thermal nymphs could do nothing for him. A journey to Naples had had no better result. Its brilliant and so much belauded sun had seemed to him black as the one in Albert Durer's picture. The spirit, on whose ill-omened wings is written the word "Melancholy," veiled for him the bright azure of the sky with her dust-strewn pinions, and ever hovered between him and the light. He had felt himself frozen on the quay at Mergellina, where the half-naked lazzaroni lie baking in the sun till their skin becomes the colour of bronze.

He had returned to his own chambers in the Rue Saint-Lazare, and had apparently resumed his old manner of life. These chambers of his were as comfortably furnished as a bachelor's quarters could be. But, as a habitation in time assumes something of the physiognomy and, perhaps, of the mind, of him who inhabits it, Octave's chambers had, by degrees, come to have a touch of sadness about them. The damask of the curtains had faded, and the light which filtered through them looked grey and gloomy. The great bunches of peonies on the carpet lay withered against their soiled background, and the gilt frames of the few water-colours and drawings which hung on the walls were spotted and tarnished. The very fire seemed out of spirits, and was dying away, choked by its own smoke, in the midst of a pile of cinders. The old buhl clock ticked in a subdued fashion, and its bell sounded the passing hours with the hushed note of a sick-room. The doors closed silently, and the steps of Octave's infrequent visitors fell soundless upon the velvet-pile carpet.

Cheerfulness seemed naturally to suppress itself on passing the threshold of these melancholy, chill, and dim-

looking rooms ; where, however, nothing of modern luxury was wanting. Jean, Octave's servant, glided about like a shadow, a feather-brush under his arm or a tray in his hand, for under the influence of the spirit of the place, he had lost all his former loquacity. Against the walls there hung a trophy of boxing gloves, masks, and foils ; but it was very obvious that they had not been handled for a long time. Books, which had been taken up for a moment or two and then carelessly thrown down, lay scattered about on the furniture, and seemed to shew that Octave, by this mechanical and forced kind of reading, had been striving to drive out from his mind some persistent idea. A letter, of which only the first few words had been written, seemed to complain, by the dingy sallowness of its paper, of the months it had been awaiting its completion, and lay, like a mute reproach, on the middle of the desk. Although inhabited, the room still looked like a deserted one. There was no life there, and when one entered it, a puff of cold air came against one's brow similar to that which issues from a newly-opened vault.

In this mournful place, where never a woman had ventured to set the tip of her boot, Octave was more at his ease than anywhere else. The silence and sadness and loneliness harmonized with his humour. The joyful bustle of active life was distasteful to him, though he sometimes made an effort to join in it ; but he always returned in a still more gloomy frame of mind from the masquerades or excursions or supper parties at which his friends had entertained him ; so he had ceased at length to fight against this mysterious melancholy which oppressed him, and he let the days pass away with the indifference of a man who has absolutely no regard for the morrow. He made no plans, having no hope that he would ever be any better.

and he had, as it were, tacitly sent in his resignation of life to God, and was merely waiting till it should be accepted.

As to his appearance, if you were to picture to yourself a face fleshless and deep-lined, a livid complexion, nerveless and scraggy limbs, and a general look of decay and prostration, you would have a quite wrong idea. The most that could be truthfully said was, that the skin beneath his eyes was unhealthily discoloured; that the whites of his eyes were unnaturally sallow, that there was some slight show of fever in the blue veins which showed themselves prominently on his temples. The spark of life, indeed, never gleamed in his eye, from which all desire and hope seemed to have flown away. This look of death in so young a face formed a strange contrast, and produced a more painful effect upon those who saw it, than the emaciated features and fever-lighted eyes of the ordinary patient.

Before this languor had seized hold of him, Octave had been, and, indeed, he still was, a handsome young man. His abundant black hair, with its short thick curls, massed itself round his temples, soft and lustrous. His velvety almond-shaped eyes, coloured with the blue of the sky at night, and fringed round with long drooping lashes, still glittered sometimes with dimmed fires. When they were at rest, and no flow of feeling animated them with a momentary excitement, they were still noticeable from that same expression of quiet serenity which you may see in the eyes of the Orientals as they lounge about the café doors at Smyrna or Constantinople and bask in the sun, after having smoked their narghilés. His complexion had never had much colour, but exhibited, rather, those southern tints of olive-white, which are seen to advantage

only by gas-light. His hands were small and delicately made; his feet narrow and arched. He dressed well, keeping neither in advance of nor behind the fashion of the day, and he understood thoroughly how to profit the most by his personal endowments.

How came it about, you will ask, that this young man, handsome, rich, with so many reasons for being happy, was pining away so miserably? You will guess, perhaps, that Octave was worn out by dissipation, that his mind had become feeble and enervated by the absorption of unwholesome ideas from the popular romances of the day, that he had lost all belief in everything, that nothing but debts remained to him from the wreck of his youth and fortune, wasted and consumed in mad orgies of pleasure. All these suppositions, however, would be equally incorrect. Octave had never indulged more than very slightly in the pleasures of the world, and so could scarcely have been filled with the weariness of satiety. He was not splenetic, nor romantic, nor an atheist, nor a libertine, nor a spendthrift. His life, hitherto, had been shared between study and a young man's ordinary amusements. In the morning he had attended lectures at the Sorbonne, and in the evening he had taken his stand by the staircase at the opera to watch the procession of gay toilettes go by. His expenses were limited to his income, and he allowed no whims to make any inroads upon his capital. He had the respect of his solicitor; so he was, you see, a perfectly sane and respectable person, quite incapable of hurling himself from a glacier like Manfred, or of lighting the suffocating brazier of Esconsse.

What the real cause was of the singular state in which he found himself, and which escaped all the investigations of medical science, we hardly dare say, so improbable, so

incredible, would it appear in this Paris of the nineteenth century, and we prefer to let our hero speak for himself.

As the ordinary physicians seemed to be quite baffled by the strange disease, for they have not yet been able to dissect a soul in their schools of anatomy ; as a last resort, recourse was had to a strange professor, who had recently returned from India, after a long residence there, with the reputation of having effected some very marvellous cures.

Octave, with a kind of prescience of the new physician's greater powers of observation, and his capability of reading this hitherto unpenetrated secret, seemed to be unwilling to receive him, and it was only on the persistent entreaties of his mother that he consented to see M. Balthazar Cherbonneau.

When the doctor entered the room, Octave was reclining on a couch in a half-sitting, half-lying posture. His head rested upon a cushion, another supported his elbow, while a third was laid over his feet. He was reading, or rather, he was holding a book in his hands, for his eyes paid no attention to what was before them. His face was pale, but, as we have already said, presented no special appearance of disease. A superficial observation would not have led anyone to believe that there was anything seriously the matter with this young man, by whose side, upon a small table, a box of cigars took the place of the usual phials and potions, and pill-boxes, and the other kindred preparations generally to be found under such circumstances. His clearly-cut features, though he was evidently suffering from fatigue, had lost none of their old grace, and, save for his profound dejection, and the sad hopelessness of his expression, Octave seemed to be enjoying fairly good health.

However indifferent Octave might usually feel about everything, he could not help being struck with the strange appearance of the doctor. M. Balthazar Cherbonneau looked like a personage who had wandered out of one of Hoffmann's fantastical stories, and was contemplating, in a condition of amazed reality, this grotesque world of ours. His face, of a peculiarly tawny hue, had the appearance of being half-swallowed up by his enormous skull, which the loss of his hair caused to seem even bigger than it really was. This bald skull, smooth as a billiard ball, had retained its pale hue, while the face of the doctor, exposed to the heat and brilliance of the sun, had assumed the colour of old oak or of some well-smoked family portrait. The bones stood in such relief that the fleshless and many-wrinkled skin which covered them looked rather as if it had been stretched over some death's-head instead of growing on a living man's skull. The few grey hairs which still lingered round his occiput, grouped in three scanty patches, made one rather regret that the old-fashioned custom of wearing a wig had passed away, and gave a grotesque finish to this quaint head, which might have been the original of some wooden Nuremberg nut-cracker.

But it was the doctor's eyes which most attracted attention. In the centre of that face, sallowed by age, scorched by burning skies, and worn by study, in which the anxieties of life and deep research had ploughed deep furrows and spreading crows' feet and countless wrinkles, shone two turquoise-blue eyes, beaming with supreme clearness and youthful freshness. These blue stars gleamed from the depth of their dark orbits which, with their concentric membranes, seemed vaguely to remind one of the layers of feathers lying like an aureola round the night-

cleaving pupils of the owl. One felt inclined to think that the doctor, by some charm which he had learned from brahmins and pundits, had stolen away the eyes of some young child and had fixed them in his own cadaverous head. The eyes of the old doctor were the eyes of a youth of twenty ; the eyes of the young Octave were the eyes of a man of sixty.

M. Balthazar Cherbonneau wore the ordinary dress of a physician : coat and trousers of black broad-cloth, and a waistcoat of black silk. On his shirt-front sparkled a large diamond, the gift of some nabob or rajah. His clothes hung loosely about him, almost as though they were hanging on a wardrobe peg, and fell in long perpendicular folds which the doctor's thighs and shins diverted into sharp angles when he sat down. For the production of such a phenomenon of scragginess, even the devouring sun of India would not have been sufficient. Doubtless Balthazar Cherbonneau had, in some initiatory rites, endured the prolonged fasts of the fakirs and had lain on a gazelle-skin in the centre of the four blazing braziers. His extremely wasted condition, however, did not suggest any idea of weakness. Powerful-looking tendons, stretched across his hands like violin strings, bound together the fleshless bones of his fingers, and enabled him to move them without—as one half expected—their clattering against each other.

The doctor seated himself on the chair which Octave pointed out to him by the side of the couch, in a manner which seemed to suggest that he was more accustomed to squatting on mats. When he was thus seated, M. Cherbonneau turned his back to the light, which was streaming full upon his patient's face ; a favourable position for examination, and one which observers, who are more anxious to see than to be seen, are always glad to adopt. Although

the doctor's face was in the shade, and the top of his bald head, round and shining like some huge ostrich egg, alone caught the light, Octave was able to see the scintillation of the strange blue eyes, which seemed to be endowed with a peculiar phosphorescent light. There shot from them a sharp clear glance which affected the young invalid with the warm and pricking sensation of an emetic.

"Well, sir," said the doctor, after a moment's silence, during which he seemed to be making a rapid inspection of his patient's symptoms, "I already see that I have not in you a case of every-day pathology. You have none of the ordinary symptoms, the well-known symptoms which the surgeon either cures or aggravates; and when I have had a few moments' conversation with you, I shall not ask for a scrap of paper to write out some formula from the pharmacopœia, with a hieroglyphical signature at the bottom of it, and give it to your valet to take to the nearest chemist."

Octave smiled feebly, as though to thank M. Cherbonneau for sparing him useless and tedious remedies.

"But," continued the doctor, "don't begin to congratulate yourself so hastily that, because you have not got hypertrophy of the heart, nor tubercles on your lungs, nor a softening of the spinal marrow, nor serious effusions upon the brain, nor typhoid fever, it therefore follows that you are in perfectly good health. Give me your hand."

Believing that M. Cherbonneau was going to feel his pulse, and expecting to see him take out his chronometer, Octave turned up the sleeve of his dressing-gown, and, uncovering his wrist, held it out mechanically to the doctor. Without testing with his thumb the rapidity or slowness of that pulsation which marks the condition of the human clock-work, M. Cherbonneau took in his tawny palm, whose

skeleton-like fingers resembled a crab's claws, the soft and moist blue-veined hand of his young patient. He stroked it, and kneaded and pounded it, as though to put himself into some sort of magnetic communication with the young man. Octave, sceptical as he was of the power of medicine, could not prevent himself from feeling a kind of anxious emotion, for it seemed to him that the doctor was luring his soul out of him by this manipulation, and that the blood had already flowed away from his heart.

"My dear Monsieur Octave," said the physician, as he dropped the young man's hand, "your condition is more serious than you are aware of; and science, at any rate the old routine science of Europe, can do nothing for you. You have no longer the desire to live, and your spirit is, by insensible degrees, detaching itself from your body. You are not suffering from hypochondria nor lupomania, nor have you any morbid tendency to suicide. No; your case is of a very rare and curious nature, and you might, if I left you alone, and simply let matters take their course, die without there being the slightest appearance of any fatal symptom, either external or internal. It was quite time, indeed, to send for me; for your soul is clinging to your body by the merest thread, but we will tie them together again by a good strong knot."

And the doctor rubbed his hands together briskly and gleefully, while the smile which broke out on his face stirred up a sort of whirlpool of wrinkles amongst the thousand folds of his loosely-clinging skin.

"Monsieur Cherbonneau, I don't know whether you can cure me; and, to tell you the truth, I don't think I have any great desire that you should; but I must confess to you that you have discovered at your first examination the cause of the mysterious state in which you find me. I do

indeed feel as if my body were permeable, and would give as free egress to my soul, as a sieve would do to the water which was poured into it. I feel myself slipping away into the great void, and I am losing all perception of my own identity. The actual business of life, which I pretend to keep up as well as I can, that I may not distress my relations and friends, seems so unreal and so visionary to me, that there are moments when I believe that I must have already left these mortal regions. My comings and goings are, indeed, determined by the motives which formerly actuated me, and whose mechanical influence still works in me, but all I do is really nothing but a kind of automatic acting. I take my meals at the accustomed hours, and I seem to eat and drink, but I find no flavour in the most highly-spiced dishes nor in the strongest wines. The sun's rays seem to me to be pale as the moon's, and the candle flames are but darkness. I am cold on the hottest summer-day; and sometimes I feel myself overwhelmed by the most soundless silence, as though my very heart had stayed its beating and some mystic hand had laid its arresting touch on every pulse of my body. If a man can tell when he is dead, his feelings cannot be different from mine at these times."

"You are suffering," resumed the doctor, "from a chronic incapability of living. The disease is a purely moral one, and is commoner than is generally supposed. The mind is an agent which can kill quite as effectually as prussic acid or the flash from a Leyden jar; though the traces of its destructive action are not recognisable by the feeble analytical methods at the service of every-day science. What vexation is it that has dug its hooked beak into your liver? From the height of what secret ambition have you fallen to break and mangle yourself in this way? What is the bitter despair

which sets you thus listlessly brooding? Is it a thirst for power which is tormenting you? Have you voluntarily renounced some aim which is beyond man's attainment? You are very young for that. Perhaps some woman has deceived you?"

"No, doctor," replied Octave, "I have not even had that good fortune."

"And yet," resumed M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, "I read in your lustreless eyes, in the hopeless lassitude of your body, in the dull notes of your voice, the title of one of Shakespeare's plays as plainly as though it were stamped in gilt letters on the back of a morocco binding."

"And what is the play whose name I so unwittingly point for you?" asked Octave, whose curiosity was awakened in spite of himself.

"'Love's Labour's Lost!'" answered the doctor, with a purity of accent which argued a long residence in the English possessions in India.

Octave did not say anything in reply. A slight blush coloured his cheeks, and, to avoid any appearance of confusion, he began to play with the tassel of his girdle. The doctor crossed one of his legs over the other,—a position which produced the effect of a pair of "cross-bones," as one may see them on a tomb-stone, and he supported his foot with his hand in the Oriental fashion. His blue eyes gazed earnestly into Octave's, and seemed to question them with a glance that was at once authoritative and mild.

"Come," said M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, "give me your confidence. I am a mental physician, and you are my patient. Like the priest of his penitent, I demand from you a full confession, and you may make it without going on your knees."

"What would be the good of it? Even allowing that

you have guessed correctly, to tell you my troubles would not remove them. No human power, not even yours, can afford me any relief."

"Perhaps!" ejaculated the doctor, as he settled himself more comfortably in his chair, as though he were preparing to listen to what might be a lengthy confidence.

"I don't want you," said Octave, "to think me childishly obstinate, and to leave you at liberty, through my persistent silence, to wash your hands of whatever fatal result may ensue from my peculiar disease; so, since you wish it, I will tell you my story. You have already guessed the clue to it, and I won't dispute with you about details. Don't expect anything very singular or romantic. It is a very simple history, very common and trite; but, as Henri Heine says, he to whom it happens always finds it new, and breaks his heart over it. In truth, doctor, I am almost ashamed to mention such a commonplace matter to a man who has lived in the most fabulous and strange countries."

"Don't be afraid," said the doctor, with a smile; "nothing is more extraordinary to my mind than the commonest occurrences."

"Well, then, doctor, *I am dying of love.*"

CHAPTER II

"At the end of the summer of 184*," Octave went on to say, "I happened to be in Florence. That is the best season for seeing Florence. I had plenty of time and plenty of money, and good letters of introduction. Besides all this, I was a young man of easy temper and high spirits, and wanted nothing better than to be amused. I took up

my quarters on the Long-Arno. I hired a carriage, and fell into that pleasant Florentine life which is full of so many charms for the foreigner. In the morning I generally went to inspect some church, or palace, or picture-gallery, in a quite leisurely fashion, and avoiding all hurry, as I did not wish to give myself that indigestion of master-pieces which often creates in too hasty Italian tourists a complete hatred of art. At one time I would examine the bronze gates of the Baptistery ; at another, the Perseus of Benevenuto under the Loggia dei Lanzi ; the portrait of La Fornarina, or perhaps Canova's Venus at the Pitti Palace ; but never more than one thing at a time. Then I would breakfast at the café Doney, and over a cup of iced coffee I would smoke a cigar or two, and skim through the journals ; then, with a flower in my buttonhole, placed there either with or without my consent by the pretty flower-girls, in their huge straw hats, who stand about the café, I used to return home for my siesta.

"At three o'clock the carriage used to come to carry me to the Cascines. The Cascines are to Florence what the Bois de Boulogne is to Paris ; with this difference, that everyone knows everyone else, and that the circle forms an out-of-doors salon, where chairs are replaced by carriages, which are drawn up and arranged in a crescent-shaped group. The ladies, in full toilette, as they lean back upon their cushions, receive the visits of their friends and lovers, who stand, hat in hand, by the carriage step. But you know all about that quite as well as I do myself. There the plans and parties for the evening are discussed and arranged ; rendezvous are agreed upon, invitations are given and accepted. It is a kind of pleasure exchange, where business is transacted from three o'clock till five, under the shade of magnificent trees and beneath the

loveliest sky in the world. Everyone of the least position in society is considered bound to make a daily appearance at the Cascines. I took good care never to be absent, and in the evening, after dinner, I looked into a few salons, or went to the opera, if the singer was worth the trouble.

“In this way I spent one of the happiest months of my life ; but this happiness was not to last. One day a magnificent carriage appeared in the Cascines for the first time. This superb production of the carriage-builders of Vienna, a chef-d’œuvre of Laurenzi, brilliantly varnished and blazoned with a coat-of-arms of almost royal degree, was drawn by the most beautiful pair of horses which have ever pawed the ground of Hyde Park, or of St James’s on some drawing-room day, ridden by a young postillion in white leather breeches and green jacket. The brass ornaments of the harness, the axle-boxes, the handles on the doors all shone like gold as they reflected the rays of the brilliant sun. All eyes followed the course of this splendid equipage, which, after having described a circle upon the gravel, as regular as though it had been traced out by a pair of compasses, drove on and took up its position alongside the rest of the vehicles.

“This carriage was not empty, but the rapid rate at which it had been driven had rendered indistinguishable anything more than the tip of a boot stretched against the cushion of the front seat, the fold of a shawl and an open sun-shade, fringed with white silk. When the carriage was stopped, the sunshade was closed, and then our eyes were dazzled with the apparition of a woman of incomparable beauty. I myself was on horseback and was able to approach sufficiently near to her to lose no detail of this masterpiece of humanity. She wore a dress of that sea-green colour, shot with silver, which makes any woman

whose complexion is not beyond all reproach appear dusky as a mole. It was the daring of a blonde, perfectly sure of herself. A soft white shawl, richly ornamented with embroidery of the same colour, enveloped her in its supple folds, like a tunic by Phidias. Round her face, like an aureole, circled a hat of the finest Florence straw, trimmed with forget-me-nots and delicate water-plants, with pale narrow green leaves. Her only ornament was a gold-mounted lizard, gemmed with turquoises, that coiled itself round the wrist of the hand which held the ivory handle of the sun-shade.

“ Pardon, my dear doctor, this description after the style of a magazine of fashions by a lover to whom these petty details and recollections seem of absorbing interest. Two thick bands of fair wavy hair, whose curving folds seemed like clouds of light, lay in rich profusion along the two sides of her brow ; a brow which was whiter and purer than the virgin snow which falls during the night on the highest Alpine peak. Lashes, long and sweeping, like the golden rays which the miniaturists of the middle-ages set round the heads of their angels, half-concealed eyes of that blue-green shade which the sunlight sometimes takes when it passes through a glacier. Her lips, most perfectly curved, were tinged with the crimson dye which colours the inner surface of the nautilus-shell ; while her cheeks were like the modest white roses, in which the love-song of the nightingale or the kiss of the butterfly would call up a blush. No human brush could have copied that softness of tint, with all its unseizable freshness and transparency, with all its richness of colouring, which seemed to spring from something more ethereal than the thick blood which courses through mortal veins. The first blush of dawn, as it breaks over some lofty peak of the Sierra-Nevada, the

soft flesh-tint at the edge of a white camellia's petals, the marble of Paros, glimmering through a soft rosy veil, can give you but a dim idea of it. So much of her neck as could be seen between her hat and shawl shone with a dazzling whiteness. Her lovely head seemed to strike one at first rather by its perfect colouring than its exquisite outline, as does some picture of the old Venetian school, though its features were as delicately and purely chiselled as those on an ancient gem.

"As Romeo forgot Rosalind when Juliet burst upon his sight, so, at the sight of this consummate beauty, all my former loves faded from my mind. The pages of my heart became blank again. Every name, every recollection was blotted out of them. I could no longer understand how I had been able to find the least attraction in those commonplace entanglements which so few young men are able to escape, and I reproached myself for them, as though I had been guilty of a base infidelity. A new life commenced for me from the day of that fatal meeting.

"The carriage left the Cascines and drove back towards the town, bearing away with it the beauteous vision. I walked my horse up to the side of that of a young Russian friend of mine, a perpetual frequenter of watering-places and other fashionable resorts, and at home in all the public haunts of Europe, and having a more or less extensive knowledge of every one in society. From him I learned that the lady was the Countess Prascovie Labinska, a Lithuanian of illustrious birth and great fortune, whose husband had for the last two years been campaigning in the Caucasus.

"I need not trouble you with all the stratagems I used to become acquainted with the countess; the absence of whose husband made her very reserved in the matter of

receiving visits. At last, however, I was successful. Two dowager princesses and four baronesses of mature age answered for me with their ancient virtue.

The Countess Labinska had hired a magnificent villa, which had formerly belonged to the Salviati family, about half a league's distance from Florence ; and in a few days she had succeeded in introducing every modern comfort into the ancient house, without in any way detracting from its severe beauty and serious elegance. Heavy emblazoned *portières* hung appropriately in the pointed doorways ; great arm-chairs and old-fashioned furniture harmonized with the dark oak-panelled walls and the frescoes, with their tints dim and faded like some piece of old tapestry. No crudeness, no brilliance of colour hurt the eye ; and all that was new was in perfect sympathy with what was old ; and the countess was so perfectly in her place as mistress of the old house, that it seemed as if it must have been built expressly for her occupation.

"If I had been dazzled by the radiant beauty of the countess, I was even still more attracted by the charms of her mind, which was of rare extent and cultivation. When she spoke of any subject which interested her, her soul came to the surface of her body, one might almost say, and peeped out. The purity of her face was lighted up like an alabaster globe illuminated by an inner light. There were in the subtle hues of her complexion phosphorescent scintillations and luminous quiverings, such as Dante speaks of when he is describing the glories of Paradise. Overwhelmed by the contemplation of her beauty, and enchanted with the magic of her angelic voice, which made the sweetest music out of the merest phrases, when I should have replied to her, I could only stammer out a few incoherent words which must have given her the un-

worthiest idea of my intelligence. Sometimes, indeed, I saw a fleeting smile of not unkindly irony pass like a rosy twinkle over her charming lips at some foolish expression of mine, the result of my troubled infatuation.

"I had not yet dared to say to her a single word of my love. In her presence I lost all my resolution, all my strength, all my courage. My heart beat wildly, as though it would leap from my breast and lay itself at the knees of its sovereign. Twenty times had I resolved to make my confession, but an insurmountable timidity held me back. The slightest appearance of coldness or reserve on the part of the countess caused me frightful anxieties, comparable only with those of the condemned man who, with his head on the block, awaits the descent of the knife which in a moment or two will cleave his neck. I was half choked by the involuntary contraction of my muscles, while my whole body was bathed in an icy perspiration. I blushed and then grew pale, and came away without having said a single word of what I had intended to say, having been scarcely able to totter through the doorway, and reeling like a drunken man as I went down the steps of the house.

"When I had got outside my faculties returned to me, and I breathed out to the air the most burning dithyrambs. I addressed my absent idol with the most irresistible eloquence. I equalled in my apostrophes the greatest poets of love. Petrarch's sonnets with their platonic subtilties, Henry Heine's 'Intermezzo,' with its flow of nervous and delicious sentiment, did not approach the ceaseless outpourings of soul in which my whole being went out. At the close of each one of these monologues of mine, it seemed to me that the countess, subdued and won over by my pleading, must surely come down from heaven and bless my love, and more than once I have

closed my arms across my breast, imagining that I clasped her within them.

“I was so completely possessed and absorbed by my passion for her that I passed whole hours in murmuring, like litanies of love, the two words,—‘Prascovie Labinska’—finding an inexpressible pleasure in these dear syllables, which at one time I would, as it were, string loosely together like pearls, and, at another, repeat with the feverish volubility of a devotee whom his prayer has thrown into a state of exaltation. At other times I traced her adored name upon the fairest sheets of vellum, in all the calligraphic beauties of the manuscripts of the middle ages, adorned with gilded and illuminated floriated scrolls and blazons. I carried out these tasks of mine with an enthusiastic elaboration and almost childish minuteness of detail during the weary hours which elapsed between my visits to the countess. I could not read or occupy myself in any other way. Nothing interested me except what concerned Prascovie, I even left my letters from France lying unopened.

“I made several futile attempts to put an end to this unsatisfactory condition of affairs. I tried to recall the received axioms of the ‘art of love,’ to remember the stratagems employed by the Valmonts of the Paris cafés, and the Don Juans of the Jockey Club ; but my heart failed when I thought of carrying them out, and I regretted that I had not, like Stendhal’s ‘Julian Sorel,’ a progressive series of letters, which I might copy out and send to the countess. I contented myself with loving her, giving myself wholly and asking nought in return. I was without even the most distant hope, and, in my most audacious dreams, I never got beyond kissing the tips of Prascovie’s rosy fingers. The fifteenth century novice, prostrate before the steps of the

altar, with his brow on the cold stone ; the fifteenth century knight, kneeling painfully in his unyielding mail, could scarcely have offered a more unreserved adoration to the Madonna they worshipped."

M. Balthazar Cherbonneau had listened to Octave's narrative with profound attention ; for to him the young man's story was something more than a mere romantic history ; and he muttered, as though he were speaking to himself, during one of Octave's momentary pauses.

"Ah ! yes, I clearly recognise the diagnosis of the love-passion, a very curious malady, which I have only met with once before, at Chandernagore, in a young pariah girl who was in love with a brahmin. She died of it, poor girl ; but she was only an uncivilised creature ; while you, Monsieur Octave, are civilised, and we will cure you."

As the doctor brought this interruption to an end, he signalled with his hand to M. de Saville to continue his narrative, and folding his leg back against his thigh, like the sharply-jointed limb of a grasshopper, so as to support his chin upon his knee, he settled himself in a position which would have been impossible for anyone else, but seemed particularly comfortable to him.

"I do not wish to weary you with all the details of my secret martyrdom," continued Octave, "so I will come at once to a decisive point. One day, when I was quite unable to suppress or control my overpowering desire to see the countess, I anticipated the hour when I usually visited her. The day was overcast and lowering. I did not find Madame Labinska in her salon. She was seated under a portico, supported by slender columns which opened upon a terrace through which one descended to the garden. She had had her piano brought there, and a couch and some cane chairs. Jardinières piled up with the choicest flowers

—and nowhere are they so sweet and fragrant as in Florence—filled the spaces between the columns, and impregnated the breezes from the Apennines with their perfume. In front, one looked upon the yews and clipped box-trees in the garden, where some ancient cypresses grew, and which was peopled with marble deities after the style of Baccio Bandinelli or Ammanato. In the distance, springing up from dimly seen Florence, the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore loomed roundly, and the square belfry of the Palazzio Vecchio cleaved the air.

“The countess was alone, leaning back on her couch. Never had I seen her looking so beautiful, as she lay there, in careless attitude, languid from the heat, draped like some sea-nymph in the foam-white folds of a dressing gown of Indian muslin, edged with a fleecy border, like the silver fringe of a wave. A brooch of Khorassan steel fastened round her breast this robe that was light and airy as the drapery which floats round the statue of Victory tying her sandal. From sleeves that lay open to the elbow peeped out arms which were whiter than the alabaster from which the Florentine sculptors carve their copies of the statues of the ancients. A broad black ribbon, knotted round her waist, its ends falling free, stood out in bold relief against its pure white background. Any touch of melancholy which might have been suggested by the union of these two colours, symbolical of mourning, was dissipated by the tip of the little Circassian slipper of blue morocco leather, embroidered with yellow silk, which peeped from under the lowest fold of the muslin.

“The fair hair of the countess, in its slight disarrangement, as though disturbed and ruffled by the breezes, exposed to view her pure calm brow ; and her transparent temples, on which the light gleamed in golden sparkles, shone like a rainbow.

"Near her, on a chair, there lay a large white hat of fine straw, trimmed with long black ribbons like those which girdled her waist, and a pair of *Suede* gloves, which had not been worn. When she saw me, Prascovie closed the book she was reading—the poems of Mickiewicz—and nodded to me kindly. She was alone, a rare and propitious circumstance. I seated myself in front of her, on the chair to which she pointed me. One of those silences which are so painful when they are prolonged, followed. I could not summon up to my aid any of the ordinary conversational trivialities. I grew embarrassed. Fiery waves seemed to surge up from my heart to my eyes, and my love cried out within me, 'Do not lose this supreme opportunity!'

"I don't know what I might not have done, if the countess, guessing at my trouble and its cause, had not stretched out towards me her beautiful hand, as though to close my mouth, saying,—

" 'Do not say a single word, Octave. You love me—I know it, I feel it, I believe it. I do not think any the worse of you for it, for love is beyond our control. Other women, of severer minds, might have shewn themselves offended with you ; but I, I only pity you, for I cannot love you ; and it pains and saddens me that I should cause you unhappiness. I regret that you should ever have met me, and I curse the caprice which brought me to Florence from Venice. I hoped at first that my persistent coldness would weary and estrange you ; but nothing can wear out true love, whose every sign I see in your eyes. Do not let my present sympathy give rise to any illusion on your part, to any dream of what might be ; and do not take my pity for encouragement. An angel with a shield of diamond and a sword of fire guards me against all seduction, better even than religion, better even than duty, better even than

virtue itself could do ; and that angel is my love. I adore Count Labinski. I have had the happiness of finding the one object of my passion in my husband !’

“ A wave of tears sprang to my eyes when I heard this confession, at once so open, so loyal, and so nobly modest, and I felt the mainspring of my life snap within me.

“ Prascovie, deeply moved, rose from her reclining position ; and, acting upon an impulse of her gracious, womanly pity, passed her cambric handkerchief across my eyes, as she said,—

“ ‘ Come, don’t give way to your grief. It is my wish. Try to think of something else. Imagine that I have gone away for ever ; that I am dead. Forget me. Travel, work, do good ; take an active part in life. Console yourself with art, or in another love.’

“ I made a gesture of impatient dissent.

“ ‘ Do you think you will suffer less if you continue to see me ?’ the countess went on to say ; ‘ well, I shall always be willing to receive you. God has said that we should pardon our enemies ; why, then, should one treat those who love us worse ? Still, separation seems to me to be the better plan. In two years we might be able to grasp hands without any danger—for you,’ she added, with an attempt at a smile.

“ The next day I quitted Florence ; but neither study nor travel nor time has in the least degree diminished my pain, and I feel that I am dying. Don’t interfere with me, doctor, and prevent me.”

“ Have you ever again seen the Countess Prascovie Labinski ?” asked the doctor, whose blue eyes gleamed with a strange expression.

“ No,” replied Octave, “ but she is in Paris ;” and he

handed to M. Balthazar Cherbonneau a card, on which was engraved :—

THE COUNTESS PRASCOVIE LABINSKA.

At Home on Thursday.

CHAPTER III.

AMONGST the comparatively few who at that time made their way to the Champs-Élysées by the Avenue Gabriel, between the Ottoman Embassy and the Élysée Bourbon, and bordered on one side by trees and on the other by gardens, preferring its silence and peaceful freshness to the dusty eddies and fashionable tumult of the main road, there were not many who did not stop and look for a moment, with a feeling of admiration mixed with envy, at a poetical and mysterious retreat, where—a rare union—wealth seemed to live mated with happiness.

To whom has it not happened to arrest his steps at the gate of some park, and gaze for a time upon the white villa that just gleamed through the trees, and then to go on his way again with a full heart, as if the dream of his life lay hidden within those walls? On the other hand, there are some houses, thus momentarily seen from the outside, which inspire one with an intangible feeling of sadness and gloom. Weariness, desolation, despair lie

darkling upon their façades and hang like a blight upon the scantily leaved trees. The statues are stained with a mossy leprosy ; the flowers seem to be gasping away their life, the water in the basins of the fountain is green and slimy, and ill-looking weeds cumber up the paths and laugh the hoe to scorn ; and the birds—the birds are silent.

The gardens were separated from the road by a dry ditch, and extended as far as the mansions which front the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. The garden we are speaking of terminated in an embankment sloping down to the fosse, and on which were walls of rough boulders, selected from the curious irregularity of their shape. These, rising up on each side like side scenes at a theatre, framed in with their rugged inequalities and massive heaviness the fresh green landscape which smiled between them.

Within the cavities of these boulders cactuses, asclepiads, saxifrage, house-leeks, Alpine lychnis, ivy, and many another rock plant found soil enough for their nourishment, and spread out their varied verdure over the surface of the stone. A painter could not have imagined a fairer background for a picture. The boundary walls which shut in this terrestrial paradise were hidden beneath a curtain of climbing plants, passion flowers, campanulas, honey-suckle, wistaria and Virginia creeper, the tendrils and twining shoots of which interlaced themselves into one green mass. The arrangement of the garden made it resemble rather a clearing in a forest than a mere narrow plot hemmed about and circumscribed by the boundaries of civilisation.

A little behind the boulder-built walls were a few clumps of ornamental trees, and beyond extended a lawn of the finest grass, not one blade of which was higher than another : turf which was softer and silkier than a queen's

mantle, and of that ideal emerald tint which is only to be seen in the lawn of some English manor house ; a fleecy natural carpet which the eye loves to dwell upon and the foot almost fears to tread ; which seems, during the day-time, to be the fitting play-ground only of the tame gazelle and the lace-robed, high-born infant, and, in the evening, under the soft rays of the moon, to be worthily pressed only by the light steps of a patrician Titania, as she saunters along, hand-in-hand with some Oberon whose name is written in the gilded book of the peerage.

A path of sand, which had been passed through a sieve lest any broken shell or sharp piece of flint should remain to injure the aristocratic feet which delicately pressed it, bordered, like a yellow ribbon, this green cloth, close-cropped and compact, kept ever perfectly flat by the roller, and ever fresh, even on the hottest summer-day, by careful watering.

At the end of this lawn, at the time of our story, there blazed—a real firework of flowers—a mass of geraniums, whose crimson petals burned against a dark background of peaty soil.

The prospect was closed by the picturesque façade of the house. Slender Ionic columns supporting a double-sloping roof, crowned at each angle by a group of statues, gave it the semblance of a Greek temple transported thither by the whim of a millionaire ; and, by the ideas of poetry and art which it summoned up, softened down what else might have seemed too luxurious. Between the columns, blinds, with wide rose-coloured stripes, which were nearly always lowered, shielded the windows, level with the ground, which opened upon the portico like so many glass doors.

When the fickle sky of Paris condescended to spread out

its blue expanse behind this house, such picturesque glimpses of its outlines could be caught through the tufts of verdure, that it might well have appeared to a passer-by to be the residence of the Queen of the Fairies.

From each side of the house extended conservatories forming wings, whose crystal sides sparkled in the sunlight, and cheated the choice collection of rare and delicate exotics into the belief that they were still in their native regions.

If some early-rising poet had passed along the Avenue Gabriel at the first glimmering of dawn, he might have heard the nightingale just finishing the last notes of his nocturne, and seen the yellow-legged blackbird hopping about the garden, like a bird who was thoroughly at home. But at night, when the roll of the last carriage on its way back from the opera had died away, and the world was sleeping, that same poet might have caught a glimpse of a white shadow leaning on the arm of a handsome young man, and he would have gone away and climbed up into his lonely garret with a sad and desolate heart.

It was in this house, as doubtless the reader has already guessed, that the Countess Prascovie Labinska was living with her husband, Count Olaf Labinski, now returned from the war in the Caucasus, after a glorious campaign, in which, though he had not actually fought hand to hand with the mysterious and unapproachable Schamyl, he had certainly contested matters with some of the most fanatically devoted of the illustrious scheik's followers. He came off unharmed by the rifle-balls, as brave men do come off, though they throw themselves straight in their way, and the curved blades of the wild warriors had snapped themselves against his breast, without bringing him down. Courage is the surest armour. Count Labinski

was gifted with that impetuous valour, which is characteristic of the Slavonic races, who delight in danger for its own sake, and to whom the refrain of an old Scandinavian song is still applicable, "They slay, they die, and laugh."

How intense was the rapturous joy with which this husband and wife, for whom marriage was but passionate love receiving the sanction of God and man, found themselves once more united.

Were we to attempt to describe their supreme felicity, we should first of all have to transform each drop of ink in our pen into a globule of light, while each word drying on the paper would need to throw out flame and perfume like fragrant incense. How can we describe these twin souls which had mingled into one single one, as two pearly tears of dew, falling down the smooth whiteness of the lily's petal, meet, touch, and are straightway absorbed into each other, never more to know a separate identity! Happiness is so rare a blessing, that man has not thought it worth his while to invent a vocabulary capable of expressing it adequately, while the words descriptive of moral and physical suffering fill column after column in the dictionaries of every tongue.

Olaf and Prascovie had loved each other from their earliest childhood. Never had the heart of either beat but for one single name. They recognised almost from the cradle that they belonged to each other, and the rest of the world had no existence for them. They might have been the fragments of Plato's Man-Woman, which had been searching for each other since their primæval divorce, and had, at last, once more met and become one again. They formed that duality in unity, which is complete and perfect harmony, and side by side they stepped, or rather, flew

through life with equal and steady wing ; like two doves, whom the same desire animates, to make use of the beautiful simile of Dante.

That nothing might trouble their serene happiness, an immense fortune wrapped them round with a golden atmosphere. Wherever this radiant pair appeared, there misery alleviated quitted its rags, and tears dried themselves, for Olaf and Prascovie had the noble egotism of happiness, and they could endure no wretchedness in their sight.

Since the departed polytheism has carried away with it all its young gods and smiling spirits, those celestial youths and maidens of such consummate beauty, such harmonious proportions, such ideal perfection ; and since ancient Greece no longer sings to the worship of beauty in her marble strophes, man has cruelly abused the liberty which has been granted him of being plain ; and, though made after the likeness of God, to-day represents it badly enough. But Count Labinski had taken no advantage of this licence. The slightly-lengthened oval of his face ; his slender nose, with its fine chiselling ; his strongly-marked lip, accentuated by a pale moustache, pointed at the ends ; his dimpled chin ; his black eyes ; the pleasing touch of formal courtesy in his manner,—all gave him something of the air of the angel warriors, Saint Michael and Saint Raphael, who, clad in their golden armour, fought and vanquished the Evil One. He would have been too beautiful, if it had not been for the expression of strong determination which shone in his dark eyes, and the dusky brownness which the Eastern sun had burned into his face.

The count was of middle height, of slight and lissom build, but with muscles of steel concealed within his seemingly delicate frame ; and when, at some state ball,

he wore his magnate's dress, heavy with gold and starred with diamonds and embroidered with pearls, he glided through the crowded rooms like a glittering apparition, rousing feelings of jealousy in the men and of love in the women, to all of whom his passion for Prascovie made him quite indifferent. We need only add that the count's mental endowments were equal to his physical ones; for the good fairies had all clustered round his cradle with their gifts, and the wicked one, who generally manages to circumvent all the rest, had fortunately been in a good humour that day.

You will understand that Octave had little chance of success against such a rival, and that he did wisely in tranquilly resigning himself to die quietly on the cushions of his couch, in spite of the hope with which the strange doctor, Balthazar Cherbonneau, tried to inspire him. To forget Prascovie would have been the only thing for him to do, but it was an impossibility; and what good could it do him to see her again. Octave knew well that the resolution of the young countess would never swerve from its position of gentle implacability and compassionate coldness. He feared that his still uncicatrized wounds might open a-fresh and bleed at the sight of her who had, in all innocence, given him his fatal wound; and he did not wish to accuse that sweet, slaying soul of his death.

CHAPTER IV.

Two years had passed away since the day when Countess Labinska had stayed that declaration of a love, to which she could not listen, on Octave's lips. Octave, hurled from

the dizzy height of his hopes, had rushed off into solitude, with the hooked beak of black grief digging at his vitals, and had never let Prascovie hear of him. The only words he could have written to her were the words he had been forbidden to say. But more than once the thoughts of the countess, in whom this unbroken silence had given rise to an alarmed anxiety, had dwelt sadly upon the recollection of her old adorer. Had he forgotten her? In her complete freedom from all the spirit of coquetry, she hoped so, without being able to believe it; for it was the flame of an undying passion that had gleamed in the eyes of Octave, and she had recognised that it was so. Love and the gods stand confessed at a glance.

This thought dimmed, like a little cloud, the bright azure of her happiness, and touched her with that slight feeling of sadness, which the angels experience when they think of earth. Her sweet soul was pained to know that there was somewhere one to whom she had been a source of unhappiness: but what can the star of brightest gold that burns in highest heaven do for the poor unknown shepherd who stretches out to it his desolate, grief-wrung hands? In the old days, Phoebe did indeed come down from heaven in all her silver glory to bless Endymion in his dreams—but then Phoebe was not the wife of a Polish Count.

On her arrival in Paris, Countess Labinska had sent that formal invitation to Octave, which Doctor Balthazar Cherbouneau was turning round in his fingers, while he seemed buried in deep thought. When Octave did not present himself, Prascovie whispered to herself, with an involuntary tremor of pleasure, "He still loves me;" and yet she was a woman of angelical purity, and as chaste as the snows that lie on the highest Himalaya.

"Your story, to which I have listened attentively," said

the doctor to Octave, "proves that all hope on your part would be quite chimerical. The countess will never yield to your love."

"You see then, Monsieur Cherbonneau, that I am quite right in not striving to resume my hold on the life which is so quickly withdrawing itself from me."

"I have said that there is no hope from ordinary methods," continued the doctor, "but there exist occult powers, unknown to modern science, the tradition of which has been preserved in those strange lands, which an ignorant civilisation has contemptuously stigmatized as barbarous. There, in the first days of life, the human race, living as it did in immediate contact with the active forces of nature, learned secrets which were afterwards for the most part forgotten, and which the migrating tribes, who subsequently formed our European nations, did not carry away with them. These secrets were, at first, transmitted from one to another of those who were chosen as worthy of the knowledge, within the mysterious recesses of the temples. Afterwards they were written in sacred hieroglyphics, incomprehensible save to the initiated, carved on the sides of the crypts of Ellora. You may still see on the ridges of Mount Meron, from whence springs the Ganges, or at the foot of the white marble staircase in the sacred city of Benares, or amongst the ruins of the pagodas of Ceylon, ancient brahmins spelling out the mystic rolls, and fakirs, with shoulders scarred and seamed by the iron hooks of Juggernaut, who possess these lost secrets, and who by their aid, when they deign to make use of them, accomplish the most wonderful results. This Europe of ours, completely absorbed in material interests, never guesses to what a degree of spiritualism the Hindoo penitents have attained. Unbroken fasts, contemplations, fearful in their utter motionlessness, in impossible postures,

which are maintained unbroken through long years, have so skeletonized their bodies, that, if you could see them, squatting underneath the scorching sun, in the midst of burning braziers, letting their unpaired nails pierce through the palms of their hands, you would think they were some ancient Egyptian mummies, torn out of their coffins, and set down there, with their limbs twisted into ape-like attitudes.

“Their envelope of humanity is nothing more than a chrysalis shell which the soul, the immortal butterfly, can put off and on at will. While their poor shrivelled outer-case lies there, motionless and horrible to look upon, like some goblin of the night whom the sun has taken unawares and sleeping, their soul, untrammelled by all earthly shackles, soars on the wings of an exalted hallucination to the unknown heights of the supernatural world. To them come visions and the strangest dreams. From ecstasy to ecstasy they follow up the undulations which bygone ages have sent circling round the ocean of eternity. They career over the infinite in all its phases ; are present at the creation of the universe, at the genesis of the gods and at their metamorphoses. They rediscover the secrets of sciences which have been overwhelmed in the cataclysms of fire and water, and learn afresh the forgotten links between man and the elements. In this strange state they mutter syllables of languages which no people has spoken upon this earth for thousands of years. They can tell those primæval syllables, at whose sound light first sprang from out the ancient darkness. Men take them for fools—they who are all but gods !”

This singular preamble excited Octave's attention in the highest degree ; and, having no idea of what M. Balthazar Cherbonneau was leading up to, he fixed upon him eyes

gleaming with astonishment and curiosity. He could not see any connection between the Hindoo penitents and his own love for Countess Prascovie Labinska.

The doctor, guessing the thoughts of Octave, made a sign with his hand, as though to check all questions, and went on to say,—

“Have patience, my dear sir. You will see very soon that I am not indulging in a perfectly pointless digression. Wearied of questioning with my knife on the tables of the dissecting-room poor dead bodies which told me nothing and showed me only death when I was looking for life, I formed a plan—a plan as bold as that of Prometheus when he scaled the heavens to steal from them their fire—to surprise and lay hold of the soul itself; to analyse and dissect it, as it were. I threw aside the effect for the cause, and I cast away from me in disdain that materialistic science, whose futility seemed clear to me. To steer one’s course by the guidance of these ephemeral bodies, these chance gatherings of atoms, speedily to be severed again, seemed to me to be the grossest empiricism. I tried by magnetism to relax the bonds which tie the soul within its mortal envelope. I quickly surpassed Mesmer, Deslon, Maxwell, Puységur, Deleuze, and the cleverest of their followers in discoveries which, however wonderful these might be, were not sufficient to content me. Catalepsy, somnambulism, clairvoyance, ecstasy, all the conditions and states which are so inexplicable to the world at large, I could produce at will, and to me they were perfectly simple and intelligible.

“I soared still higher. From the trances of Cardan and Saint Thomas Aquinas I went on to the nervous seizures of the ancient Pythonesses; I discovered the secrets of the Greek Epoptai and the Hebrew magicians. I laid bare

the mysteries of Trophonius and Æsculapius, recognising in all the marvels which men relate of them either a concentration or an expansion of the soul ; brought about by gesture or look or word, or, perhaps, by the will alone or some other secret agent. One by one I repeated all the miracles of Apollonius of Thyana. Yet, even yet, my scientific ideal was not attained ; for the soul still escaped my grasp. I felt it, I heard it, I had even some control over it, for I could excite or benumb its faculties ; but yet between me and it there hung a veil of flesh, which I could not remove without its taking flight. I was like the bird-catcher who holds a bird beneath a trap, which he fears to uncover, lest his victim should dart away and be lost among the clouds.

“I went to India, hoping to find, in that land of ancient learning, the key to the enigma. I learned Sanscrit and Pacrit, the dialects of the learned and the vulgar. I could converse with the pundits and the brahmins. I traversed the jungles where the tiger lurks ready for his spring. I passed by the sacred ponds from which peeped the backs of crocodiles. I forced my way through forests which were wellnigh impenetrable with their thick-growing creepers, from whence issued crowds of bats and monkeys. I found myself face to face with an elephant at the bend of a bye-path which marked the way to the hut of a celebrated yoghi in communication with the Mounis, and I seated myself by his side for several days, sharing with him his gazelle-skin, that I might take note of the vague incantations which issued from his lips, blackened and cracked from his ecstasy. In this way I made myself master of certain all-powerful phrases, evocative formulas and the syllables of the creative Word.

“I studied the symbolical sculptures in the inner

chambers of the pagodas which no profane eye had ever beheld, and to which the robe of a brahmin enabled me to gain access. I read deeply the cosmogonical mysteries and the legends of departed civilisations. I unfolded the meaning of the emblems which the squat hybrid deities of India hold in their multifold hands. I pondered over the circle of Brahma, the lotus of Vishnu, the cobra of Siva, the blue god. Ganesa, unrolling his proboscis of thick hide and winking with his small, long-fringed eyes, seemed to smile approval at my efforts, and to encourage me to further research. All these figured monsters said to me in their stony language, 'We are only images. It is the soul which is the mainspring that sets all in motion.'

"A priest of the temple of Tirounamalay, to whom I had imparted the idea which was absorbing me, told me of a penitent living in one of the caves of the Isle of Elephanta, who had attained to the highest degree of sublimity. I discovered him leaning against the side of the grotto, wrapped in a piece of matting; his chin resting on his knees, his hand crossed round his legs, in a state of complete rigidity; his eyes showed only the white portion; his lips closed firmly round his gumless teeth; his skin, tanned and discoloured from his extreme attenuation, was stretched tightly over his cheek-bones; his hair was thrown back, hanging in stiff unkempt locks, like the shoots of some rock-plant falling down from a stony ridge; his beard was parted into two waves which almost swept the ground, and his nails were curved like the talons of an eagle.

"The sun had so scorched and dessicated his naturally brown skin as to give it almost the appearance of basalt. In the attitude in which he was squatting, he looked, in form and colour, like a Canopic vase. At the first sight of him,

I thought he was dead. I shook his arms, stiffened with a cataleptic rigidity. I shouted into his ear with my loudest voice the sacramental words which should make me known to him as one of the initiated : but he did not stir, and his eyes showed no sign of life. I was going to retire, despairing of obtaining any information from him, when I heard a strange, crackling sound ; a bluish glare passed before my eyes with the lightning rapidity of the electric flash, hovered for a moment over the half-opened lips of the penitent, and disappeared.

“Brahma-Logum—that was the name of the holy man—seemed to wake up from his trance. The pupils of his eyes fell down into their natural position. He looked at me with a human-like expression, and replied to my questions.

“‘Now thy desires are satisfied. Thou hast seen a soul. I have attained the power of being able to detach mine from my body whenever it pleases me. It flies away and comes back again like a luminous bee, visible only to the eyes of the initiated. I have fasted so long, prayed so unceasingly, and meditated so continuously, and punished myself so rigorously, that I have been able to untie the earthly threads which held it in thrall ; and Vishnu, the god of the ten incarnations, has revealed to me the mysterious word which guides it in its AVATARS through different forms. If, after having made the sacred gestures, I were to pronounce that word, thy soul would fly away to animate the body of whatever man or beast I should name to it. I bequeath this secret to thee, a secret which I alone of all the world now know. I am well pleased that thou hast come, for I am wearying to plunge myself into the bosom of the uncreated, like a drop of water into the sea.’

“And then the penitent gasped out to me, in a feeble voice, like the last death-rattle of a dying man, yet

with all distinctness, certain words which made me feel the blood-curdling and shudders of which Job speaks."

"What do you mean by all this, doctor?" cried Octave, "I dare not allow myself to fathom the dizzy depths of your thoughts."

"I mean," replied M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, very tranquilly, "that I have not forgotten the magic formula of my friend, Brahma-Logum; and that the Countess Prascovie would be very clever if she were able to discover the soul of Octave de Saville in the body of Olaf Labinski."

CHAPTER V

THE reputation of Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau as a physician and thaumaturgist was beginning to spread through Paris. His eccentricities, real or affected, were making him fashionable. Far, however, it was said, from trying to work up for himself a practice, he did his best to repel patients by shutting his doors against them, or by ordering them strange prescriptions and impossible régimes. He would only accept desperate cases, passing on to his colleagues, with a proud disdain, all mere vulgar inflammations and commonplace fevers; but in the wellnigh hopeless cases he undertook, he brought about cures inconceivable in the brilliancy of their success, and the simplicity of their method. Standing by his patient's bedside, he made a few magical passes over a cup of water, and then the body, which had already grown stiff and cold, and seemingly, fit only for the shroud, after swallowing a drop or two of this enchanted liquid, through teeth which the

agony of death had already almost locked together, appeared once again in all the animation of life and the glow of perfect health ; and sat up on the bed, looking round with eyes which had already grown accustomed to the shadow of the grave. By cures of this kind he earned the names by which he was popularly called, the Doctor of the Dead and the Resurrectionist.

It was not always, however, that he would undertake these seemingly hopeless cases, and he often refused magnificent offers from dying plutocrats who sought his aid. To win his help in the struggle against death, his heart must be touched with the pathos of some fond mother's appeal to him to save her only child, or by the despair of some lover who besought him to stay the ebbing tide of his adored one's life ; or, if he thought that the life in danger was one which poetry, or science, or human progress could ill afford to lose, then all his skill and experience were readily granted to restore it to the world again. Actuated by these feelings, he cured a lovely child, round whose tender throat croup had clutched its iron fingers ; a fair young girl, in the last stage of consumption ; a poet, the victim of delirium tremens ; an inventor, the secret of whose discovery a congestion of the brain seemed likely to bury for ever beneath the ground.

On the other hand, he would sometimes say that one should never strive in opposition to nature ; that for certain deaths there was a positive cause, and that there was a danger, in trying to prevent them, of throwing into confusion the universal order of things. You will see that M. Balthazar Cherbouneau was the most paradoxical of practitioners, and that he had brought back with him from India a complete system of eccentricity ; but his renown as a magnetizer overshadowed his reputation as a mere physician.

He had given before a small selected audience a few séances concerning which such marvellous stories were told as upset all preconceived notions of the possible and the impossible, and left far behind them all the prodigies of Cagliostro.

The doctor occupied the ground-floor of an old house in the Rue du Regard : his rooms opening one into another, with high windows looking out upon a garden planted with tall trees. Although it was summer-time, great hot-air stoves puffed out their warm breath through the large rooms, and kept the temperature up at some ninety-five or a hundred degrees Fahrenheit; for M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, accustomed to the burning suns of India, shivered beneath the pale skies of Paris, as the traveller, who has returned from the sources of the Blue Nile in Central Africa, shivers at the cold of Cairo, and he never went out-of-doors, except in a closed carriage, protected against the cold by a blue Siberian fox-skin, and with his feet resting upon a metal foot-warmer filled with boiling water.

The only furniture of the doctor's rooms consisted of low couches, upholstered with Oriental fabrics, pictured with chimerical wild beasts and fabulous birds; carved stands, coloured and gilded with the barbarous crudeness of the natives of Ceylon, and Japanese vases filled with exotic flowers. On the floor was stretched one of those sombre-looking carpets, with a black and white floral pattern, which the Thuggs weave as a work of penitence when they are shut up in prison, and which strike one as being woven from the murderous hemp of their makers. A few Hindoo idols, of bronze or marble, with their long almond-shaped eyes, and noses pierced with rings, their thick lips smiling, their necks decked with strings of pearls which hung down almost to their waists, crossed their legs in the corners.

Along the walls were hung miniature water-colour sketches,

the work of some painter at Calcutta or Lucknow, representing the nine AVATARS already accomplished by Vishnu in the bodies of a fish—a tortoise—a pig—a lion with a human head—a Brahmin dwarf—Rama, a hero fighting the thousand-armed giant, Cartasuciriargunen—Kitsna, the miraculous child in whom some dreamy minds have seen an Indian Christ—Buddha, the worshipper of the great god, Mahadevi—and, last of all, he was represented as in deep sleep, in the midst of the Milky Way, lying on the five-necked serpent, whose five bent heads formed a canopy over him, awaiting the hour of his last incarnation when he should assume the body of a white-winged horse, and by letting his shoe drop down upon the universe bring about the final destruction of the world.

In the inmost room, which was even hotter than the others, sat M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, surrounded with Sanscrit books, with the characters engraved by a bodkin-point on thin sheets of wood, through the corners of which small holes had been drilled, so that they could be strung together, in a way that made them resemble Venetian blinds rather than the volumes which one sees in European libraries. An electrical machine, with its glass crank-turned discs, and gold-foiled jars, stood, a disquieting and complicated piece of mechanism, in the middle of the room, by the side of a mesmeric trough. M. Cherbonneau was by no means a charlatan, and never strained after dramatic effect ; yet it was difficult to find one's self in this strange-looking apartment without experiencing something of that feeling which the old alchemists' laboratories must have inspired.

Count Olaf Labinski had heard of the wonders wrought by the doctor, and his half-incredulous curiosity had been excited. The Slavonic races have a natural inclination towards the marvellous, which the most careful education

cannot always remove; and, besides, the most credible witnesses who had been present at the doctor's séances, had told such extraordinary stories as to what had happened at them, that no one, whatever his confidence in his informant might be, could believe them without having actually seen for himself. So Olaf, whose curiosity was strongly excited, arranged with the doctor to pay him a visit.

When the count found himself in M. Balthazar Cherbonneau's apartment, he felt as though he were wrapped round by some subtle flame. His blood rushed to his head. The veins about his temples swelled up. The extreme heat suffocated him. The aromatic oil of the lamps, the huge flowers from Java, balancing their enormous cups, like censers, intoxicated him with the stupefying emanations and penetrating odours. He tottered forward a few steps towards M. Cherbonneau, who was squatting on his divan, in one of those strange positions which are affected by the fakirs and sannyâsis. Any one would have said, on seeing the angles of his joints outlining themselves beneath the folds of his clothes, that he was a human spider, lying curled up in the middle of his web, and holding himself in motionless readiness to spring upon his prey. At the sight of the count, his turquoise-blue eyes shone with a phosphorescent glow from their bristle-brown orbits, but paled again immediately, as though some film had been dropped down over them. The doctor reached out his hand towards Olaf, whose feeling of discomfort he quite understood; and, with two or three passes, surrounded him with an atmosphere which breathed all the freshness of the spring-time, and made for him a special Paradise in this Inferno of heat.

"You are feeling better now? Your lungs, accustomed to the winds off the Baltic, still keeping the chill freshness which they have gathered up among the Polar snows, pant

and puff like a pair of bellows in this close atmosphere; where I, on the other hand,—I who have been cooked and re-cooked, and almost calcined in the solar furnaces,—shiver with cold.”

Count Olaf Labinski made a sign to convey to the doctor the fact that he no longer felt any discomfort from the high temperature of the room.

“Well,” said M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, in a kindly tone, “you have heard, I suppose, of some of my magnetic feats, and you would like to have a sample or two of my skill? Oh, yes, I am more powerful than Comus, Comte, or Bosco.”

“My curiosity is not of so frivolous a nature,” replied the count, “and I have more respect for one of the princes of science.”

“I am not a *savant*, in the generally-received meaning of the word. On the contrary, rather, by studying certain matters which orthodox science holds in contempt, I have acquired control over occult and unemployed forces, and I have brought about results which, though they seem marvellous, are yet merely natural. Ever on the watch for the soul, I have occasionally surprised it, and it has yielded me confidences by which I have profited, and revealed to me secrets which I have remembered. Spirit is everything; matter has only a phantom existence. The universe is perhaps nothing more than a thought of God, or an irradiation of the Word in space. I can strip off the corporeal rags at will; I can retard or advance life; I can displace the seats of the senses; I can annihilate space; I can extinguish pain without having recourse to chloroform, ether, or any other anæsthetic drug. I can animate and I can paralyse. Nothing is opaque to my eyes. My vision can cleave anything. I can see distinctly the waves of thought, and just

as the colours of the solar spectrum can be projected upon a screen, I can make them pass through my invisible prism, and can compel them to picture themselves on the white canvas of my brain. But all this is but a trifle when compared with the prodigies which some of the Hindoo yoghis, who have reached the highest degree of asceticism, can perform. We Europeans are too frivolous, too much distracted with various matters, too trifling, and too much in love with our earthly prison to open out in it great windows, through which the soul may gaze up into eternity and the infinite. Yet, for all that, I have obtained some strange results, and you are going to see some of them," said Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, as he made the rings which supported a heavy curtain, hiding a kind of alcove built into the wall, glide back along their pole.

By the light of a spirit-lamp, which flickered on a bronze tripod, Count Olaf Labinski looked upon a spectacle so gruesome that even all his bravery could not save him from trembling as he gazed. Upon a table of black marble lay the body of a young man, naked to the waist, and cadaverous in its motionless rigidity. His breast bristled with arrows, like Saint Sebastian's, though not a single drop of blood issued from the wounds. He seemed, as he lay there, like a coloured image of a martyr, the careless artist of which had forgotten to tinge the openings of the wounds with vermilion.

"This strange doctor," muttered Olaf to himself, "is perhaps a worshipper of Shiva, and this is some victim he has offered to his idol."

"He is in no pain at all. You may stab him without fear; not a muscle of his face will stir;" and the doctor drew the arrows out of the body as one might pick pins out of a pin-cushion.

A few rapid passes with his hands released the patient from the mesh of influences which controlled him, and he awoke to consciousness with the smile of ecstasy upon his lips, as though he had just passed through some entrancing dream. M. Balthazar dismissed him with a gesture, and he retired through a little door let into the panelling of the alcove.

"I might have cut off one of his legs or arms, and he would not have felt it," said the doctor, wrinkling up the folds of his skin in the manner which with him did duty for a smile. "I did not do so, because I have not yet acquired the power of creation, and man, inferior to the lizard in that respect, has not a vital fluid of sufficient force to renew the limbs he may have lost. But, if I cannot create, I can, on the other hand, restore youth that has passed away."

Thereupon he raised a veil, which covered an elderly woman lying on a couch in a magnetic trance, near the table of black marble. Her features, which must once have been beautiful, had lost their freshness, and the ravages of time were plainly marked in the shrivelled contour of her arms and her shoulders and breast. For a few minutes the doctor fastened upon her the glance of his turquoise-blue eyes, gazing at her with an intense earnestness. The sunken outlines of her body gradually regained their youthful fulness ; her bosom once more shone with its virginal purity, and her scrawny neck again gleamed soft and white and smooth. Her cheeks blushed full and velvety again, peach-like to the touch, as in the first freshness of her youth. Her eyes sparkled vivaciously as she opened them, and the mask of old age, snatched away, as it were, by a magician's hand, restored to sight the lovely young girl who had so long ago disappeared.

"Don't you believe, now, that the Fountain of Youth is still pouring out its waters?" asked the doctor of the count, who was standing speechless with amazement at this transformation. "I believe it myself, for man invents nothing, and all his dreams are but divinations or recollections. But let us leave for a moment this form which I have shaped anew, and let us consult that young girl who sleeps so tranquilly in the corner there. Question her; she knows far more than the Pythonesses and Sibyls of old. You can bid her go to any one of your seven chateaus in Bohemia, and ask her what your most secret drawer contains, and she will tell you, for her soul will not require more than a second to make the journey; a fact which, after all, is not very surprising, since electricity can speed over sixty thousand leagues in the same space of time, and electricity is to thought as a waggon is to a post-chaise. Give her your hand to bring yourself into communication with her. There will be no necessity for you to formulate your questions in words; she will read them in your thoughts."

The young girl in a voice as toneless as that of a ghost, replied to the mental questioning of the count.

"In the cedar coffer there is a cake of earth, sprinkled over with fine sand, on which I can see the imprint of a small foot."

"Has she given you a correct answer?" the doctor asked carelessly, and as though he felt quite sure of the infallibility of the somnambulist.

A deep blush crimsoned the count's cheeks. He had, indeed, in the early days of their love, dug out a piece of earth on which was the impression left by one of Prascovie's feet, and he had preserved it, as a relic, enclosed in a box crusted over with mother-of-pearl and silver of the most

costly workmanship, and whose tiny key he always wore suspended round his neck.

M. Bathazar Cherbonneau was a man of the most perfect courtesy, and, when he perceived the count's seeming uneasiness, he did not press his question, but conducted the count to a table on which stood a cup of water, clear and colourless as a diamond.

"You have doubtless," said he, "heard of the magic mirror in which Mephistopheles shewed Faust the image of Helen. Without having a cloven foot hidden away inside my stocking, or a couple of cock's feathers in my hat, I can perhaps entertain you with this perfectly innocent wonder-worker. Bend your eyes over this cup and think intently of any person you would like to see, living or dead, far away or near at hand. The one you want to see will come at your summons, be it from the ends of the world or the depths of history."

The count bent over the cup, and the water seemed to grow troubled under his gaze, assuming opalescent hues, as though some essence had been dropped into it; a circle of the prismatic colours rimmed the edge of the cup, and framed with its rainbow tints the picture which was already outlining itself under the milky cloudiness.

The haziness cleared away. The image of a young woman in a lace peignoir, her eyes of sea-green tint, her hair of wavy gold, her hands glancing, like white butterflies, over an ivory key-board, appeared at the bottom of the now-transparent water, as distinctly as though reflected by a mirror, and of such marvellous perfection that an artist might well have died of despair on beholding it. It was Prascovie Labinska, who, without knowing it, had obeyed the passionate summons of the count.

"And now let us pass on to something still more

curious," said the doctor, as he took the count's hand and placed it upon one of the iron bars which projected from the mesmeric trough. Olaf had no sooner touched the metal, densely charged with magnetic power, than he fell down as though struck by lightning. The doctor took him up in his arms, carried him off like a feather, and placed him upon a couch. Then he rang a bell, and said to the servant who appeared in answer to his summons,

"Go and bring Monsieur Octave de Saville here."

CHAPTER VI.

THE rolling of carriage wheels over the stones disturbed the silence of the courtyard of the old house, and almost immediately afterwards Octave presented himself before the doctor. He stood dazed and seemingly stupefied when M. Cherbonneau showed him the body of Count Olaf Labinski stretched out on the couch, and presenting every appearance of death. At first he thought he had been murdered, and, for a moment or two, he was struck silent with a shuddering horror. Then, after a closer examination, he saw signs of a feeble respiration in the just perceptible risings and fallings of the young sleeper's breast.

"See," said the doctor, "here is your disguise quite ready for you. It is a little more difficult to put on than a domino hired from Babin ; but Romeo, when he clambered up the balcony at Verona, was not troubled by the possibility of breaking his neck. He knew that Juliet was waiting for him in her room above ; and Countess Prascovie Labinska is of quite as much value as the daughter of the Capulets."

Octave, unnerved by the strangeness of his situation, remained silent. He still kept his eyes fixed upon the count, who lay, with his head supported on a cushion, like an effigy which sleeps on its marble pillow in gothic cloisters, over some knightly tomb. The sight of that handsome and noble form, from which he was going to drive the soul which owned and animated it, filled him in spite of himself with a feeling of remorse.

The doctor mistook Octave's reverie for hesitation and doubt. A vague smile of disdain wandered over his lips, and he said,

"If you haven't made up your mind, I can easily awaken the count, who will go away in just the same condition as he came, full of wonder at my magnetic science ; but do you think you will ever have such a good opportunity again ? Still, whatever interest I take in your passion, whatever desire I have to make an experiment which has never yet been attempted in Europe, I ought not to conceal from you that this interchange of souls is not without its dangers. Lay your hand upon your breast and question your heart. Dare you boldly stake your life on this supreme card ? Love is strong as Death, say the Scriptures ?"

"I am ready," Octave replied, quietly.

"Good ! young man," said the doctor, rubbing his dry, brown hands against each other with an extraordinary rapidity, as though he were trying to obtain fire after the method of the savages, "this passion, which recoils before no danger, pleases me. There are really but two things in the world, passion and will. If you are not happy, it will certainly not be my fault. Ah ! my old Brahma-Logum, you are going to see from the height of Indra's heaven, where the apsaras surround you with their voluptuous s ng, whether I have forgotten the all-powerful formula

which your soul gurgled into my ear, ere it flitted away from your mummified carcase. The words and the gestures, I remember them all ! And now let us get to work. We are going to make a strange broth in our caldron, like Macbeth's witches, but without the ignoble sorcery of the North. Seat yourself before me, there, in that arm-chair ; yield yourself up with the most perfect confidence to my power. Good ! fix your eyes on my eyes, rest your hands against my hands. Already the charm begins to work. Your conceptions of time and space are fading away ; your consciousness of me is being lost.—The eyelids are closing ; the muscles, receiving no longer the commands of the brain, lie unstrung and slack ; the mind slumbers ; all the fine threads which tie the soul to the body are unloosed.—Brahma, in his golden egg, where for ten thousand years he lay asleep, was not more completely severed from his externals. Let us saturate him with influences, and bathe him in emanations."

The doctor, while he was muttering spasmodically these sentences, did not for a moment discontinue his passes. From his outstretched hands shot luminous gleams, which settled on the brow and heart of the patient, around whom there was gradually formed a kind of visible atmosphere, phosphorescent as an aureole.

"Good, very good !" said M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, congratulating himself upon the success of his endeavours. "He is just in the condition I desired. Stay, what is it that seems to be setting itself in opposition to my influence ?" he cried, after a moment's pause, as he appeared to read through Octave's skull the signs of some last effort of his almost annihilated personality. "What is that rebellious idea, which, driven out from the convolutions of the brain, attempts still to withdraw itself from my power,

by hiding itself in the primitive monad, in the central point of life? I shall know how to lay hold of it and crush it."

To overcome this involuntary opposition, the doctor threw a still more powerful charge of magnetism into his glance, and arrested the mutinous idea between the base of the cerebellum and the junction of the spinal cord, the most secret sanctuary, the most sacred tabernacle of the soul. His triumph was now complete.

Then he made ready, with a majestic solemnity, for the unparalleled experiment he was about to attempt. He clad himself, like some ancient magician, in a white linen robe, washed his hands in perfumed water, took some powders out of various boxes, and with these marked strange hieroglyphical characters on his cheeks and brow. Then he clasped round his arm the cordon of the Brahmins, read two or three slokas out of the sacred poems, and carefully observed every detail of the ritual which had been prescribed by the sannyâsi in the caves of Elephanta.

These ceremonies completed, he opened to their fullest extent the apertures of the stoves, and the room was quickly filled with so close and heated an atmosphere, as would have made the very tigers pant with exhaustion in their native jungles, have cracked the cuirass of mud round the rugged hide of the buffaloes, and burst open, with a quick detonation, the great blossom of the aloe.

"I must take care that these two sparks of the divine fire, which, stripped of their mortal envelope, will so soon be houseless and naked for a few seconds, don't pale and die out in our glacial atmosphere," said the doctor, glancing at the thermometer, which then marked one hundred and twenty degrees Fahrenheit.

Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, as he stood between the

two inert bodies, looked, in his white robes, like the sacrificing priest of one of those sanguinary religions which pile up the bodies of men on the altars of their gods. He suggested that priest of Vitziliputzili, the hideous Mexican idol of which Henri Heine sings in one of his ballads, but his intentions were certainly less murderous.

He drew close to the still perfectly motionless body of Count Olaf Labinski, and pronounced the ineffable syllable ; which he then rapidly repeated over the profoundly comatose form of Octave. The usually odd looking figure of M. Cherbonneau seemed at this moment endowed with a weird majesty. The mightiness of the power he wielded ennobled his irregular features ; and, if anyone could have seen him thus performing these mysterious rites with so sacerdotal a solemnity, he would scarcely have recognized in him the Hoffmannesque doctor, who challenged, while he defied, the pencil of the caricaturist.

Then some strange and wonderful things took place. Octave de Saville and Count Olaf Labinski seemed to be simultaneously shaken with a convulsive agony. Their features were contorted, and a slight foam frothed round their lips. The pallor of death bleached their skins, while two little quivering bluish gleams, burned with uncertain light over their brows.

At a gesture of the doctor, charged to the full with magnetic influence, which seemed to point out to them the journey which the master bade them take, the two phosphorescent points set themselves in motion, and leaving behind, as they flew along, a track of light, sought their new resting-places. The soul of Octave hid itself within the body of the Count Labinski, and the count's soul in the body of Octave.

The AVATAR was accomplished !

A slight blush on the cheeks signalled the return of life to these tabernacles of clay, which had for a few seconds remained tenantless of soul, and which the grim Angel of Death would have clutched as his prey, if it had not been for the doctor's wonder-working power.

The blue eyes of Cherbonneau shone with bright fires in the joy of his triumph, as, striding with long steps about the room, he exclaimed to himself :

"Let the most vaunted physicians do as much ! They who are so proud of patching up, more or less effectually, the clock-work of the body when it gets a little out of order ! Hippocrates, Galen, Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Boerhaave, Tronchin, Hahnemann, Rasori—the humblest Hindoo fakir, squatting on the steps of a pagoda, knows a thousand times as much as any of you ! What matters the body, when one can command the soul ?"

As he finished this outburst, Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau made several little leaps in the exultation of his spirits, and narrowly escaped falling upon his nose, having entangled his foot in the folds of his Brahminical robe ; a little accident which recalled him to himself and restored to him all his usual coolness.

"Let us awaken our sleepers," said M. Cherbonneau, after wiping off the streaks of coloured powder with which he had marked his face, and divesting himself of his Brahmin's dress. Then, standing before the body of Count Labinski, animated by the soul of Octave, he made the necessary passes to rouse it from its comatose condition, shaking from his fingers, after each pass, the magnetic fluid which he had withdrawn from the sleeper's body.

At the end of a few minutes, Octave-Labinski (we shall so describe M. de Saville in the future for the sake of clearness) raised himself from his reclining position, drew his

hands across his eyes, and cast about him a look of surprise and astonishment, from which all expression of conscious identity and personality was absent. When he had fully recovered his power of clear vision, the first thing that met his eyes was his own body lying on the couch in front of him. He beheld himself, not reflected from the surface of a mirror, but in reality. A cry burst from his lips—a cry whose tones were not those of *his* voice—and as he heard it, a shudder passed through him. Of the interchange of souls, which had taken place during his magnetic trance, he had no recollection, and he felt strangely ill at ease. His mind, acting through new agents, was like a workman who has had all his old and well-known tools taken from him, and an entirely fresh set of new and strange ones given to him in their stead. The expatriated soul beat its unquiet wings against the prison-house of this unknown cranium, and lost itself amongst the windings of a brain which still retained some traces of another occupant.

“Well,” said the doctor, when he had sufficiently amused himself with Octave-Labinski’s look of surprise, “and what do you think of your new habitation? Does your soul feel itself comfortably settled in the body of this handsome count, hetmann, hospodar, or magnate, the husband of the fairest woman in the world? You are no longer so anxious about being allowed to die as you were the first time I saw you, in your gloomy room in the Rue Saint-Lazare, now that the doors of the Hotel Labinski are thrown wide open to you, and that you need no longer have any fear of Prascovie laying her hand upon your lips, as she did at the villa Salviati, when you make love to her! You now know that old Balthazar Cherbonneau, with his cockatoo’s face, which, by the way, he would not

change for any other, has some fairly wonderful tricks in his conjuring box ! ”

“ Doctor,” replied Octave-Labinski, “ you have the power of a god ; or, at anyrate, of a demon ! ”

“ Oh, don’t be alarmed ! There is not the least devilry in the matter, I assure you ! Your salvation runs no danger whatever. I am not going to make you sign an agreement with your blood. Nothing could be simpler than what has just taken place. The Word which could call the light into being, is quite powerful enough to make a soul change its home. If men would only listen to God speaking through time and eternity, they could do all that I have done, and more.”

“ By what reward, or by what devotion, can I show you my gratitude for this inestimable service that you have rendered me ? ”

“ You owe me nothing, and are under no kind of obligation to me. You interested me ; and for an old Lascar like me, tanned and burnt by many a scorching sun, an emotion is a rare and precious thing. But get up and stretch yourself, and walk about, and see if your new skin sits easily about the arm-pits.”

Octave-Labinski followed the doctor’s directions, and walked several times round the room. He already began to feel more at his ease. Although occupied by another man’s soul, the count’s body was still swayed by its old habits, and its new tenant yielded himself to these physical influences, for it was a matter of importance to him to preserve the gait and demeanour and gestures of the expelled proprieter.

“ If it had not been I myself who had just now presided over the interchange of your souls,” said Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, with a laugh, “ I should not suspect that

anything out of the common had occurred this evening, and I should take you for the true, legitimate, and genuine Lithuanian Count Olaf de Labinski, whose personality is still slumbering over there in the shell which you have disdainfully cast off and left for him. But it is nearly midnight. Be off, lest Prascovie scolds you, and accuses you of preferring lansquenet and baccarat to her. It won't do to commence your new life as her husband by quarrelling. It would be a bad augury. In the meantime, I will occupy myself in waking up your old envelope, with all the care and precaution it deserves."

Recognising the propriety of the doctor's observations, Octave-Labinski hastened to take his departure. Opposite the entrance steps of the house, the magnificent bay horses of the count were pawing the ground with impatience, and champing their bits, while the roadway beneath them was covered with foam from their mouths. At the sound of the young man's footsteps, a magnificent footman, in green livery, one of the almost extinct race of the heyducs, leaped down to the carriage-step, which he let fall with a crash. Octave, who at first had been going mechanically towards his own modest brougham, installed himself in the lofty and splendid carriage, and said to the footman, who passed the word on to the coachman, "Home."

The door was closed immediately, and the horses started off at a gallop, while the worthy successor of the Almanzors and Azolans slung himself into his place by the broad-laced straps, with an agility which could scarcely have been expected in one of his towering height.

For horses of their magnificent breed, the journey from the Rue du Regard to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré is not a long one. The distance was annihilated in a few minutes, and the coachman cried with his stentorian lungs, "Gate!"

The two huge folding gates, swung aside by the porter opened a free passage to the carriage, which turned into a broad gravelled court-yard, and drew up with remarkable precision underneath a blue and rose-coloured striped awning.

The court-yard, whose every detail Octave-Labinski noticed, with that rapidity of vision which comes to us on certain supreme occasions, was of large extent, and was surrounded by symmetrical buildings. It was lighted by bronze gazaliers, whose flame shone through crystal globes, which suggested a palace rather than a private house. Boxes of orange trees, worthy of the terrace at Versailles, were arranged at equal distances along the margin of asphalt, which, surrounded, like a border, the carpet of gravel that covered the centre of the court-yard.

The transformed lover was obliged, as he stepped to the ground, to stand for a moment or two and place his hand to his heart to stay its throbbing. He, indeed, possessed the body of Count Olaf Labinski, but it was only its mere physical appearance that was his. All the thoughts and ideas which had filled the brain had taken flight with the soul of the late owner. The house, which was henceforth to be his, was quite unknown to Octave-Labinski. He had not the least knowledge of its internal arrangements. He saw a flight of steps in front of him. He went up them, wherever they might lead him, trusting that if he had made a mistake, it would be put down to his abstraction.

The pure white of the stone steps threw into strong relief the bright crimson of the wide carpeting, fixed in its place by rods of gilded bronze, and defining the soft path for the feet. Vases, filled with the most beautiful exotic flowers, stood on each step. An immense carved lamp, suspended by a thick purple silk cord, ornamented with loops

and knots, cast its golden beams on the white stuccoed walls, smooth and polished as marble, and poured out a flood of light on a replica, by the artist's own hand, of one of Canova's most celebrated groups, Cupid embracing Psyche. The landing of the single storey was floored with mosaics of costly workmanship, and on the sides of the walls were suspended by silken cords four paintings by Paris Bordone, Bonifazio, Old Palma, and Paul Veronese, whose architectural and magnificent style harmonised well with the splendour of the staircase.

From out this landing there opened a lofty door, covered with serge and studded with gilt nails. Octave-Labinski pushed it open and found himself in a vast antechamber, where some lackeys, in full livery, were lying asleep. At his approach, they all rose, as though upon springs, and ranged themselves along the side of the walls with the imperturbability of Oriental slaves.

Octave-Labinski passed on. Going through the antechamber, he came to a room hung with blue and gold which was quite unoccupied. He rang the bell. A waiting maid presented herself.

"Can madame receive me?" he asked her.

"Madame la Comtesse has just retired to her dressing-room, but she will be able to see you presently."

CHAPTER VII.

LEFT alone with the body of Octave de Saville, in which the soul of Count Olaf Labinski was sleeping, Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau set himself to work to restore this inert form to ordinary life. After some passes, Olaf-de-

Saville (by this junction of names we shall designate this double personage) escaped from the limbo of the profound sleep, or rather catalepsy, which had held him a prisoner, rigid and motionless, upon the couch. He rose with a motion that was merely automatic, for his will had not yet resumed its sway, and reeled under his still remaining sensation of giddiness. The furniture in the room seemed to be swimming round him ; the incarnations of Vishnu danced a saraband over the walls, and Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau appeared in the likeness of the sannyâsi of Elephanta, waving his arms like the wings of a bird, and rolling his blue eyes within their brown wrinkled orbits, that looked like the rims of the lenses of a pair of spectacles.

The strange sights which the count had beheld before he had fallen into his magnetic trance haunted his mind ; and it was only by degrees that he recovered a clear consciousness of where he actually was. He was like a man suddenly awakened out of a night-mare, who takes his clothes, lying by his bedside or hanging against the wall, and still retaining in their folds some vague suggestion of the human form, for goblins and spectres, and the brass curtain-hooks, reflecting the pale glimmer of the night-light, for flaming eyes.

Little by little these confused visions passed away, and everything resumed its natural appearance. M. Balthazar Cherbonneau was no longer a Hindoo penitent, but merely a doctor of medicine, smiling upon his patient with an expression of everyday courtesy.

"Monsieur le Comte is satisfied, I hope, with the few experiments I have had the honour of making before him ?" said the doctor in tones of obsequious humility, in which, nevertheless, a slight inflection of irony might have been detected. "May I hope that he does not regret his evening,

and that he will leave me convinced that everything that is told about magnetism is not mere fable and deceit, as orthodox science pretends ? ”

Olaf-de-Saville nodded assent, and went out of the room, accompanied by Doctor Cherbonneau, who made the deepest obeisances at each door-way as they passed out.

The brougham drew up before the door, and the soul of the husband of Countess Labinska with the body of Octave de Saville got into it, without noticing that neither the livery nor the brougham was his own.

The coachman inquired where his master desired to be driven.

“ Home ! ” replied Olaf-de-Saville, with a confused feeling of surprise at not recognising the voice of the green-liveried footman, who generally asked him that question with a strong Hungarian accent. The brougham in which he was riding was lined with dark blue damask. His own carriage was bright with quilted yellow satin, and the count felt some astonishment at this change, though he accepted it as one accepts in dreams, readily enough, the appearance of familiar objects in strange disguises and under unusual aspects, yet still retaining sufficient of their old identity to be recognisable. He felt himself to be shorter than he used to be, and he was almost certain that he had gone to the doctor’s house in evening dress, while now, without any recollection of having changed his clothes, he found himself wearing a summer suit of light material, which had certainly never formed part of his wardrobe. He felt a strange uneasiness, and his thoughts, which had been so clear in the morning, were now painfully confused. Attributing his singular feelings to the strange sights of the evening, he gave himself no further trouble about them ; and, leaning his head back in a corner of the brougham,

he let his mind wander away into a hazy reverie, a vague somnolence which was neither sleep nor wakefulness.

The sudden halt of the horse and the coachman's cry of "Gate" recalled him to himself. He lowered the window, and, putting out his head, saw, by the light of the lamp, a street that was strange to him, and a house that was not his.

"Where in the world have you brought me to?" he cried; "this is not the Faubourg Saint Honoré or the Hotel Labinski."

"Pardon, monsieur, I did not understand," muttered the coachman, as he set his horse's head in the direction indicated.

As he was being driven quickly through the streets the transformed count propounded to himself several questions to which he could find no satisfactory answers. How was it that his carriage had gone away without him, since he had given orders that it should wait for him? How was it that he now found himself in some one else's carriage? He came to the conclusion that some little touch of fever was disturbing the clearness of his mind, or that perhaps the wonder-working doctor, in order to be able to work the more strongly upon his credulity, had made him inhale during his sleep the vapour from a flask of haschich or some other stupefying drug, and that a night's rest would effectually clear his brain again and dissipate his illusions. The brougham drew up before the Hotel Labinski. The porter, however, when summoned by the coachman, refused to open the gates, saying that there was no reception there that evening, and that his master had come home more than an hour ago, and that his mistress had retired to her room.

"Are you drunk or mad, idiot?" cried Olaf-de-Saville, pushing aside the colossus who stood towering on the

threshold of the half-opened gates, like one of the bronze statues of the Arabian Nights which barred wandering cavaliers from all approach to enchanted castles.

"You must be either drunk or mad yourself, my fine fellow," replied the porter, whose complexion, usually crimson, anger had now transformed to a blue tint.

"Scoundrel!" roared Olaf-de-Saville, "if it were not for my own self-respect——"

"Hold your tongue and go away, or I will break you in pieces across my knee, and throw the bits into the street," interrupted the giant, stretching out his mighty hand. "It won't do to play tricks on me, young man, just because you have drunk a bottle or two of champagne too much."

Olaf-de-Saville, in his exasperation, thrust back the porter so violently that he succeeded in forcing his way through the gates. Some servants, who had not yet gone to their beds, came up, attracted by the noisy altercation.

"I dismiss you on the spot, scoundrel that you are. I forbid you even remaining here for the night. Be off at once, or I shall kill you as I would a mad dog. Don't drive me into spilling the miserable blood of a lackey!"

And the count, dispossessed of his own body, sprang forward, his eyes all bloodshot, his lips foaming, and his hands clenched, at the gigantic porter who, seizing his assailants' two hands in one of his own, held them fast and almost broken in the vice of his thick short fingers, as though they were confined in some instrument of torture of the middle ages.

"Come, come, calm yourself," said the colossus, who was a good fellow at heart, and felt not the slightest fear of his adversary, to whom he administered an occasional shaking by way of enforcing his attention and respect. "Is it a sensible thing for you, who are dressed like a gentleman,

to get yourself into such a state as this, and then to come and make disturbances at respectable houses in the middle of the night? You ought to be more careful with your wine, and it must be famous liquor that you have been drinking to put you into this condition. It's just because you haven't the least idea of what you are doing, that I don't half murder you. As it is, I will content myself by laying you quietly down in the street, where the police will soon have hold of you if you don't grow a little quieter. A few hours in the lock-up may clear your brain."

"Rascals," cried Olaf-de-Saville, turning to the lackeys, "do you stand by and see your master, Count Labinski, insulted by this miserable blackguard?"

When they heard these words, "master," and "Count Labinski," the servants broke out into a loud jeer. An enormous burst of laughter, convulsive, and of Homeric volume, shook their be-laced breasts.

"*You*, the Count Labinski! you must be *very* drunk to have got such a fine idea as that into your head!"

A cold perspiration trickled down Olaf-de-Saville's temples. An agonising thought flashed through his brain like a blade of steel, and his marrow froze within his bones. Had the porter actually already put his heavy knee on his breast and crushed the life out of him, or was he still alive? Had his mind been utterly clouded and numbed beneath the bottomless sea of mesmerism? Was he the sport and plaything of some diabolical machination? Not one of his generally so obsequious lackeys recognised him; they who were so humble and so devoted to him. Had he, then, changed his body, in the same way as he had changed his carriage and his clothes?

"That you may be quite sure that you are not Count Labinski," said one of the most impertinent of the group,

"see, here he comes himself down the steps, to find out what all this disturbance is about."

The porter's captive turned his eyes towards the further end of the court, and saw a young man standing under the awning, of a slight and well-moulded figure, with an oval face, black eyes, an aquiline nose, and a light moustache. It seemed to be none other than himself, or his double, made by some demon in his very likeness, with an exactness that must deceive everyone.

The porter released the imprisoned hands. The lackeys ranged themselves respectfully against the wall, their eyes cast down, and their hands hanging by their sides in perfect immobility. To the phantom who was approaching, they rendered all the honours which they refused to the true count.

Prascovie's husband, with all his Slavonic courage, felt an unspeakable thrill of horror at the sight of this Menechmeso, who more terrible than the dramatic one, mingled in actual life and made his original unrecognisable.

An old family legend recurred to his mind, and still further increased his feelings of horror. Each time that a Labinski was to die, he was warned of it by the appearance of a phantom in every respect like the doomed man. Amongst the races of the North, to see one's double, even in a dream, has always been considered a fatal presage, and the bold warrior of the Caucasus, at the sight of this phantom of himself, was overwhelmed with an irresistible superstitious terror. He who would have plunged his arm into the mouth of a cannon just ready to be fired off, shuddered and recoiled before his own image !

Octave-Labinski came forward towards his old body, in which the count's soul was struggling and shuddering, and addressed it in tones of icy and distant courtesy.

"Monsieur, be good enough to cease compromising yourself with these servants. If you wish to speak to Count Labinski, he can be seen between noon and two o'clock. Madame la Comtesse receives the visits of those who have had the honour of being presented to her on Thursdays."

Having uttered these sentences in deliberate and clearly-cut tones, the false count returned into the house without the slightest sign of being disturbed, and the doors were closed after him.

Olaf-de-Saville was carried to his brougham in a fainting condition. When he recovered his senses, he found himself lying upon a couch, which was not his own, in a room in which he had not the slightest recollection of ever having been before. By his side stood a strange servant, who was supporting his head, and trying to make him inhale the vapour of a flask of ether.

"Does monsieur feel better?" asked Jean of the count, whom he took for his master.

"Yes," answered Olaf-de-Saville; "it was only a passing faintness."

"Shall I leave you or remain here, sir?"

"No, you needn't stay. Leave me alone; but before you go, light the lamps by the mirror."

"Don't you think, sir, that the bright light may keep you from sleeping?"

"Oh no! not at all; beside, I am not feeling inclined for sleep at present."

"I shall not go to bed, sir, and if you should want anything, I will answer your bell immediately," said Jean, much alarmed at the count's pallor and disturbed expression.

When Jean, after having lighted the lamps, had left the room, the count glanced at the mirror, and in its pure crystal, where shone the reflected brightness of the lights,

he beheld a young face, with a gentle but sad expression, crowned with thick black hair. The eyes were of a deep blue, the cheeks pale, the beard brown and silky. The face he gazed upon was not his own, and it seemed to return his look from the depths of the mirror with an expression of surprise. He compelled himself to believe, for an instant, that some practical joker had placed his face within the frame of the Venetian mirror, after having removed the glass; but a moment's examination showed that there was no one behind it.

His hands, as he looked at them, seemed to have grown thinner and longer, and the veins were more conspicuously marked. On the ring-finger jutted out a heavy gold circlet bearing an engraved coat-of-arms. This ring had never belonged to the count, and his arms were quite different from those engraved on the stone. He felt in his pockets, and found there a little case containing visiting-cards, and the name on them was "Octave de Saville."

The jeers of the servants at the Hotel Labinski, the apparition of his double, the unknown physiognomy which he had seen reflected in the mirror instead of his own, might possibly, perhaps, be the illusions of a diseased brain; but these strange clothes, this ring on his finger, were material, palpable things, evidence which it was impossible to doubt. He must have undergone, quite unconsciously, some complete metamorphosis—there could be no longer any question of it—some demon, perhaps, had stolen his body, his name, his rank, his whole personality, and had left to him only his soul, without any means or possibility of manifesting his identity.

The strange stories of "Peter Schlemil" and "St Sylvester's Night" occurred to his mind; but the heroes of Lamotte-Fouqué and Hoffmann had only lost, the one his

shadow, the other his reflection ; and, if their deprivation of those accompaniments which every one possesses, was sufficient to arouse unquiet suspicions, no one, at anyrate, could pretend to deny that they were actually themselves.

His own position was a much more unfortunate one. With this strange body, in which his soul had been imprisoned, he could not claim his title of Count Labinski. If he did so, he would pass for an impudent impostor in the eyes of all the world, or, at least, for a madman. His own wife, even, would not know him, muffled up in this lying carcase. How could he possibly prove his identity ? Certainly there were a thousand private matters, a thousand little details known to no other person, which, when he mentioned them to Prascovie, would enable her to recognise her husband's soul in its strange disguise ; but, then, what would this isolated conviction be worth, even if he could ensure it, against the unanimous opinion of the rest of the world. He was completely and absolutely robbed of his identity.

Then there was another ground for anxiety. Did his transformation merely consist of an outward change in his features and general personal appearance, or was his soul inhabiting someone else's frame ? In that case, what had become of his own body ? Had it been hastily burnt up in some lime-kiln, or had it been appropriated by the stealer of it to his own use ? The double of himself, which he had seen at the Hotel Labinski, might be a mere phantom or spectre ; but it might also be a material being, full of real life, walking about with the body which had been stolen from him by the devilish arts of that fakir-like doctor.

A terrible idea pierced his heart, like a viper's tooth. Perhaps, he thought, this feigned Count Labinski, shaped

in my likeness by those demon hands, that vampire who has installed himself in my house, whom my own servants obey in defiance of me—perhaps at this very moment his cloven foot is stepping over the threshold of that chamber, where I have never entered save with a heart as full of love and tenderness as when first I passed within it. Perhaps Prascovie is smiling sweetly upon him, and is bending her lovely head over his shoulder—marked with the devil's own claws too—taking that lying ghoul, that hateful child of darkness and hell, for me, her undoubted husband! What if I were to run to the house and set fire to it, that I might cry out, amidst the flames, to Prascovie, "You are being deceived and tricked; it is not your beloved Olaf whom you are clasping to your heart! you are on the verge of innocently falling into an abominable sin, the recollection of which will pursue my despairing soul till the very eternities have grown weary of reckoning themselves!"

Fiery waves seemed to surge up in the count's brain. He broke out into inarticulate cries of rage, he bit his fingers, and paced round the room like a wild-beast. He felt as though madness was coming upon him to extinguish utterly what consciousness still remained to him of his own real self, and he hastily filled a basin with water, plunged his head into it and lifted it out again, steaming after its icy bath.

This restored him to himself. He reasoned with himself that the days of magic and sorcery were over; that death alone could untie the threads which knitted the soul to the body; that a Polish Count, related to some of the noblest families, decorated with the first class of the Order of St Andrew, with an immense credit with the Rothschilds, and the beloved husband of a wife who was so well known

in the highest society, could not be conjured away in this manner in the middle of Paris, and that the whole business was, in some way or other, no doubt only a stupid joke, in very bad taste, on the part of Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, and that everything, in the end, would have a quite natural explanation, like the ghosts and terrors of Mrs Radcliffe's stories.

Thoroughly worn out with fatigue, he threw himself down upon Octave's bed, and soon fell into a heavy sleep, dreamless and death-like, from which he had not awakened when Jean, supposing his master to be already stirring, came into the room with the newspapers and letters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE count opened his eyes, and cast an inquisitive glance around him. He saw a comfortable bedroom, simply furnished. A spotted carpet, in imitation of a leopard's skin, covered the floor. Tapestry curtains, which Jean had just thrown aside, hung over the windows and doors. The walls were papered with a velvety green paper, without any pattern. A timepiece of black marble, with a platinum dial, surmounted by a statuette of Diana in oxidised silver, together with two ancient silver cups, stood on a mantlepiece of blue-veined white marble. The Venetian mirror, in which the count had discovered his strange metamorphosis on the previous evening, and a portrait of an elderly lady, by Flandrin, probably Octave's mother, were the only decorations to be seen on the walls of this rather mournful-looking room. A couch and an arm-chair near the fire-place, a writing-table, littered with books

and papers, made up the whole of the furniture, which, though comfortable enough, suggested nothing of the luxury of the Hotel Labinski.

"Are you going to get up, sir?" asked Jean, in those subdued tones which he had assumed during Octave's illness, as he brought the count the clothes which his master usually wore in the morning.

Although the count's feelings recoiled from putting on the apparel of a stranger, unless he meant to remain naked, he had no choice but to accept the garments which Jean brought to him, and he slipped his feet down on to the silky black bearskin, which served for a rug by the bedside. He was quickly dressed, and Jean, entertaining not the least doubt as to the identity of the false Octave de Saville, upon whom he was waiting, asked him, "At what hour would monsieur like to breakfast?"

"At the usual time," replied the count, who, that he might meet with no hindrance in the steps which he contemplated taking, had made up his mind to ostensibly accept and acquiesce in his incomprehensible transformation.

Jean left the room, and Olaf-de-Savillé opened the two letters which had been brought with the newspapers, hoping that he might find in them some information that would be serviceable to him. The first merely contained some amicable reproaches, and complained of friendly relationships broken off without any cause. The second was from Octave's notary, and contained a pressing request to come and receive a quarter's dividends, which had been due to him for a long time, or, at anyrate, to mention some investment for the money, which was now lying unproductive.

"Ah! it seems that Octave de Saville," said the count

to himself, "whose body I am now so unwillingly appropriating, has an actual existence. He is not merely an imaginary being, a character of Arnim or Clement Brentano. He has rooms, friends, a notary, dividends—everything that goes to the making up of the condition of a gentleman. Still, it seems very clear to me that I am the Count Olaf Labinski."

A glance at the mirror convinced him that this was an opinion which would be shared by no one else. Now, in the clear light of day, the reflection in the glass was exactly what it had been the previous evening, in the dimmer glow of the lamps.

Continuing his domiciliary visitation, he opened the drawers of the writing-table. In one of them he found some title-deeds, two bank notes of a thousand francs, and fifty louis d'or, all of which he appropriated, without scruple, to the requirements of the campaign he intended commencing; in the other drawer he discovered a portfolio of Russian leather, fastened by a secret lock.

Just then the door was opened by Jean, and "Monsieur Alfred Humbert" was announced. He sprang into the room with all the familiarity of an old friend, without waiting to receive the servant's answer as to whether his master was at liberty to receive visitors or not.

"Good morning, Octave," said M. Humbert, a handsome young man of an open and hearty expression, "what are you doing, what has become of you, are you dead or alive? One never sees you anywhere, and if one writes, one can't get an answer. I ought to be offended by your behaviour, but I have no pride where friendship is concerned, and I have come to look you up. One mustn't let an old college friend die of melancholy in this mournful looking room, which is as gloomy as the cell of Charles the Fifth at Yuste.

People say you are ailing, but you imagine it, that's all, so I am going to make you come out of your shell and bestir yourself; and I shall insist upon your coming with me to a merry little luncheon, at which Gustave Raimbaud is going to bid farewell to bachelor liberty."

While the young man delivered this harangue in a manner that was half serious and half jocose, he continued shaking the count's hand, which he had seized upon entering the room.

"No," answered Prascovie's husband, entering into the spirit of the part he was playing, "I am suffering more than usual to-day. I am not feeling fit for society. I should only cast a gloom over your party and bore you."

"You are looking very pale and worn, I confess. Well, then, I suppose I must leave you here till a more favourable opportunity. I must however be off myself or I shall miss three dozen of green oysters and a bottle of Sauterne," said Alfred, going towards the door. "Raimbaud will be vexed at not seeing you."

This visit increased the count's melancholy. Jean took him for his master, Alfred for his friend. There was still another test for him to bear. Later in the day the door opened; a lady, her hair streaked with silver, and bearing a striking resemblance to the portrait which was hanging against the wall, entered the room; seating herself on the couch she said—

"How are you this morning, my poor Octave? Jean has told me that you came home late last night in an alarming state of prostration. Take better care of yourself, my dear boy, for you know how dearly I love you in spite of all the trouble which your inexplicable sadness causes me; a sadness of which you persist in refusing to tell me the cause."

"Don't be alarmed, my mother, there is nothing very serious in it," replied Olaf-de-Saville : "I am feeling much better to-day."

Madame de Saville made only a short stay. Feeling reassured she rose and left the room, not wishing to vex her son who, she knew, did not like his solitude to be long interfered with.

"Now there can be no doubt that I am really Octave de Saville," said the count, as the old lady took her departure. "His mother recognises me, and does not suspect that a stranger-soul is dwelling within her son's body. I am now perhaps shut up in this envelope for ever ! A strange prison, indeed, for one's soul ! Another man's body ! It is hard to give up being the Count Olaf Labinski, to lose one's wife and fortune, one's escutcheon, and to find one's self reduced to a mere paltry middle-class condition. Oh ! I will rather tear in pieces this shirt of Nessus which has fastened itself round me than not make my escape from it some how ; and I will only return it in fragments to its former owner. Shall I go once again to my own house ? No ! I should only cause a useless scandal, and the porter would thrust me outside the gates, for I seem to have lost all my strength in this invalid's dressing-gown. Let me look around a little and investigate, for it is necessary that I should know a little about the life of this Octave de Saville, whom I am now impersonating."

The count tried to open the portfolio. The spring yielded to his random touch, and he drew out from the leather pockets first, some papers covered with a close fine hand-writing, and then a sheet of vellum. Upon the vellum a hand, evidently untrained, but a faithful copyist, inspired as it was with love, had drawn, with a success not always attained by great artists, a portrait in crayons

of the Countess Prascovie Labinska, which it was impossible not to recognise at the first glance.

The count stood amazed at this discovery. To surprise succeeded a feeling of furious jealousy. How came the likeness of his countess to be in the secret portfolio of this unknown young man? Where had it come from? Who had drawn it? Who had given it to him? Could Prascovie, whom he so religiously worshipped, have condescended from the height of her love to such a vulgar intrigue? What devilish trickery had incarnated him, her husband, in the body of this man, her lover; her whom he had always believed to be so pure? After having been the husband, was he to become merely the lover? All these thoughts surged tumultuously through his brain. He felt his reason gradually leaving him, and, to regain some degree of calmness, he made a supreme effort to restrain his feelings. Without paying any attention to Jean, who told him that his breakfast was ready for him, he resumed, with a nervous trepidation, the examination of the mysterious portfolio.

The papers appeared to be a kind of psychological journal, abandoned and resumed again at intervals. There were some fragments of it which the count devoured with an anxious curiosity.

"She will never love me! never, never! I have read in those soft eyes of hers those cruel words, than which Dante has found none harsher to write over the bronze gates of the City of Woe, 'Leave all hope behind.' What have I done that I should thus be condemned to a living death? To-morrow, the day after to-morrow, always and ever, it will be the same! The very stars may meet in their orbits, and the planets may join themselves in their conjunctions, but nothing can ever soften my harsh

fate. By a single word she has roughly awakened me from my dream ; by a gesture she has broken the pinion of my soaring love ! Fabulous combinations of impossibilities can give me no chance ; numbers thrown a thousand times into the wheel of fortune would never turn up : there is no winning number for me !"

" Miserable man that I am ! I know that the gates of paradise are closed against me, and yet I linger senselessly by the threshold, leaning against the door that I know can never be opened ; and I weep in silence, listlessly and almost unconsciously, as though my eyes were wells of springing water. I have not the courage to rouse myself and wander off into the mighty desert, or to lose myself amid the noisy Babel of men.

" Sometimes, at night, when I cannot sleep, I think of Prascovie—if I sleep, I dream of her—Oh ! how lovely she looked that day in the garden of the villa Salviati at Florence. That white dress of hers, and those black ribbons, beautiful and mournful ! The white for her, the black for me ! Whenever the ribbons, stirred by the breezes, fell into a cross against the gleaming whiteness of her dress, some invisible angel was whispering a prayer for my dying heart."

" If some extraordinary chance were to place on my brow the crown of emperors or caliphs, if the earth bled for me with her golden veins, if the diamond mines of Golconda and Visapour let me grope amid their sparkling wastes, if Byron's lyre sounded beneath my fingers, if the most perfect masterpieces of ancient and modern art lent me all their beauties, if I were to discover a new world ; alas ! all this would do nothing for me !

" Whither then is fate leading me ? I wished to go to

Constantinople where I should not have met her ; I stay at Florence, I see her, and am dying."

"I would gladly kill myself, but she breathes the air in which we live, and perhaps my greedy lips may draw in—Oh ! happy thought—some breath that has passed from her divine mouth ; and, besides, my guilty soul would be exiled to some far-off planet, where I should have no chance of trying to win her love in another life. To be still separated from her, she in paradise and I in hell ! The thought is maddening !"

"Why is it that I should love just the one woman who will not love me ? Others whom men called beautiful, who were free to love, smiled upon me with their tenderest smiles, and seemed to invite a confession which I could not make. Oh ! how happy he must be, he ! For what sublime virtue in some previous existence is God thus rewarding him here with the magnificent gift of her love ?"

It was useless reading more. The suspicions which had clouded the count's mind at the sight of Prascovie's portrait, had all been dissipated by the first lines of these confessions. He knew that this beloved likeness, drawn, perhaps, a thousand times, had been caressed and kissed, far away from the original of it, with all the unwearying affection of an unhappy love, and that it was the madonna of a secret little chapel before which hopeless adoration bowed itself.

"But what if this Octave has made an agreement with the devil to rob me of my body, and to win Prascovie's love in my form ?"

The impossibility of any such compact in the nineteenth century, soon drove the count to abandon any idea of it,

though the thought of it had, for a moment, strongly moved him.

Smiling at his own credulity, he eat the new cold breakfast, which Jean had brought him, dressed himself and ordered the carriage. When it was announced, he told the coachman to drive to Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau's house. He passed through the rooms which he had entered on the previous evening, when he still bore the name of Count Olaf Labinski, but which, when he left them, he left to be known to all the world as Octave de Saville. The doctor was seated, after his usual custom, on the couch, holding his foot in his hand, and appearing to be buried in deep thought.

At the sound of the count's steps, M. Cherbonneau raised his head.

"Ah ! is it you, my dear Octave ? I was coming to see you presently ; but it is a good sign when the patient comes to see the doctor."

"Always Octave !" said the count to himself. "I think I shall soon go mad with anger." Then, folding his arms, he placed himself in front of the doctor, and, fixing on him a terribly penetrating look, he exclaimed :

"You know very well, Monsieur Balthazar Cherbonneau, that I am not Octave, but Count Olaf Labinski ; since it was only yesterday that here, in this very room, you stole away my body from me by your infernal sorcery."

At these words, the doctor broke out into a mighty peal of laughter. He lay back on his cushions, and held his hands to his sides to check his convulsive hilarity.

"Restrain your unseasonable merriment, doctor, which you may possibly very soon repent. I am speaking quite seriously."

"So much the worse ! so much the worse ! It only shews that the listlessness and melancholy, for which I was treat-

ing you, are turning into insanity. The treatment must be changed."

"I hardly know, you doctor of the devil! why I don't strangle you here, on the spot, with my own hands!" cried the count, stepping up close to M. Balthazar Cherbonneau.

The doctor smiled at the count's threats, and just touched him with the rim of a little steel ring. Olaf-de-Saville received a violent shock, and felt as though his arm was broken.

"Oh! yes, you see, we have the means here of reducing to quietness any patient who may grow refractory," said M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, with an icy glance at the count, icy as the douche bath, which can quiet madmen, and subdue into grovelling fear the fierceness of the lion. "Go home again, and take a bath. It will calm your excitement."

Olaf-de-Saville, stunned by the electric shock, left Doctor Cherbonneau's house more doubtful and troubled in mind than ever. He told the coachman to drive him to Passy, intending to consult Doctor B——, who lived there.

"I am," he said to the great physician, "the prey of a terrible hallucination. When I look at myself in a mirror, my face does not appear reflected with its own accustomed features. The shape of the objects which surround me is changed. I do not recognise the walls or furniture of my room. It seems to me, in fact, that I am no longer myself, but some other person."

"Under what form do you see yourself?" asked the physician; "the deception may be the fault either of the eyes or the brain."

"I seem to have black hair, deep blue eyes, and a pale, bearded face."

"The description in a passport could not be more exact. You are suffering from no intellectual hallucination or per-

version of sight. You are, in reality, just as you have described yourself as appearing to be."

"I beg your pardon! My hair is really light; my eyes are black; my complexion is sunburnt; and I wear simply a pointed moustache."

"In this," said the physician, "there seem to be signs of some slight disorder of the intellectual faculties."

"However, doctor, I am in no way mad."

"Doubtlessly not. It is only the sane who ever come to me of their own accord. Over-fatigue; excessive study, or too careless living may have caused this mental disturbance, and given rise to your self-deception. Your sight is correct enough. The vision is true; it is your ideas of yourself which are chimerical. Instead of your being a fair man who sees the reflection of a dark one in the mirror, you are really a dark man who fancies himself to be a fair one."

"At anyrate, I am quite sure that I am Count Olaf Labinski; yet, since yesterday evening, everyone calls me Octave de Saville."

"That is just what I say," replied the physician; "you are Monsieur de Saville, and you imagine yourself to be Count Labinski, whom I remember having seen. He is a fair man. This entirely explains how you come to consider the face you see reflected in the mirror a strange one. That face, which is really your own, does not correspond with the imaginary idea you have formed of it, and, consequently, surprises you. Consider this, that everyone addresses you as Monsieur de Saville, and that, therefore, no one besides yourself shares in your strange fancy. Come and stay here for a fortnight. The quietness, the baths, the walks under the shady trees, will all help to dissipate what is now troubling you."

The count bowed, and promised to return. He no longer

knew what to believe. On arriving at the apartment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, he by chance saw, lying on the table, the card from Countess Labinska, which Octave had shewn to Doctor Cherbonneau.

"With this talisman," he cried, "I shall be able to see her to-morrow!"

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN the servants had carried to his brougham the genuine Count Labinski—turned out of his own terrestrial paradise by the false guardian angel standing at its threshold—the transfigured Octave returned to the little white and gold room to await the leisure of the countess.

Leaning against the white marble of the mantelpiece (the hearth under which was filled with flowers), he saw himself reflected from the depths of the mirror, which was standing opposite to him on a console-table. Although he was in the secret of his own metamorphosis, or, to speak more exactly, his transposition, he was scarcely able to persuade himself that the reflection, so unlike the one he was accustomed to see, was really the likeness of his own face, and he was unable to remove his eyes from this phantom stranger whose face and form he was now possessed of. He was looking at himself and yet he saw some one else. He glanced round him, involuntarily, to see whether Count Olaf was not leaning against the mantelpiece near him, throwing his reflection upon the glass; but he was quite alone, Doctor Cherbonneau had done his work thoroughly.

After a few minutes, Octave-Labinski no longer pondered over the marvellous Avatar which had caused his soul to pass

into the body of Prascovie's husband, but his thoughts took a direction more conformable with his situation. This incredible event, beyond all seeming possibility, and of which he would not have dared to dream even in his wildest delirium, had really happened ! He was going to find himself, very soon, in the presence of the lovely woman he adored, and she would not reject his love ! The only combination of circumstances which could possibly reconcile the realisation of his own happiness with the untainted purity of the countess had actually come about.

Impressed by this thought, his mind became a prey to anxious apprehensions and fears. The timidity of deep and earnest love rendered it doubtful and despondent as if it were still clothed in the slighted form of Octave de Saville.

The appearance of the countess's maid put an end to the tumult of thoughts which was agitating him. As she entered the room, he could not altogether suppress a nervous start, and the blood rushed to his heart as she said,

"Madame la Comtesse is ready to receive Monsieur."

Octave-Labinski followed immediately behind the maid, for he was quite ignorant of the arrangement of the house, and did not wish to betray this ignorance by going in a wrong direction to find Prascovie's room.

The servant led him to a large dressing-room, beautified with all the care and taste which refined luxury could bestow. A series of carved wardrobes of a rare and precious wood (whose doors were separated by rounded columns, round which the light spirals of the convolvulus clasped its heart-shaped leaves and bell-like blossoms, simulated with an infinite skill), formed a kind of wainscoting to one side of the room, of rare beauty and perfect workmanship. In these wardrobes were hidden away the velvet and silk robes, the cashmeres, the mantles, the laces, the sables,

blue fox-skins, bonnets, and all the paraphernalia of a pretty woman's toilette.

On the opposite side of the room were similar wardrobes, but with this difference, that the solid panels were replaced by mirrors turning on hinges, like the folds of a screen, so that the front and back and side of the figure were all reflected, and the whole effect of a new robe could be fully seen.

Against the third side of the room there was set a long toilette-table, with an alabaster top, above which silver taps poured out hot and cold water into immense Japanese bowls of porcelain. Flasks of cut Bohemian glass, which sparkled in the lamp-light like diamonds and rubies, were filled with essences and perfumes.

The walls and ceilings were hung with sea-green satin, like the inside of some jewel-case. Over the floor was spread a thick Smyrna carpet of delicately assorted hues.

In the middle of the room, upon a stand of green velvet, was placed a large box of strange shape, made of chased khorassan steel, enriched with arabesques of such extraordinarily complicated design, as to make the ornaments of the Hall of the Ambassadors in the Alhambra appear quite simple in comparison with them. Oriental art seems to have made its last effort in work of this marvellous character, in which the fairy fingers of the peris must surely have assisted. It was in this coffer that Countess Prascovie Labinska locked up her ornaments; jewels worthy of a queen, which she seldom wore, finding, rightly, that they only concealed what was more beautiful than themselves. She was too beautiful to have need of wealth. So the jewels only saw the light on solemn occasions, when some hereditary feast of the ancient house of Labinski made it necessary for the countess to shine in all her splendour. Never were diamonds less displayed by their owner.

Near the window whose ample curtains fell in thick folds, before a dressing-table and in front of a mirror supported by two cupids carved with a charming airy grace, and in the bright light of two six-branched candelabra, sat Countess Prascovie Labinska, radiant with health and beauty. A Tunis *burnous*, of almost incredible fineness, striped with blue and white rays, alternately transparent and opaque, lay round her like a soft cloud. The lightness of the material allowed the satin-like skin of her shoulders and the whiteness of her neck—beside which the snowy neck of the swan would have looked dingy—to gleam through it. Between the folds of the burnous peeped the lace of a cambric dressing-gown. Prascovie's hair was unloosened, and flowed down behind her in rich waves like the mantle of an empress. Two maids were combing and brushing it, and arranging it in curls carefully massed together, that they might not be disarranged by contact with her pillow.

While this delicate operation was going on, the countess was amusing herself by balancing on the tips of her toes a tiny slipper of white velvet, embroidered with gold, so tiny that it would have made all the khanouns and odalisques of the Padisha jealous if they could have seen it. Occasionally she threw aside the silky folds of the burnous, and bared her snowy arm as her hand pushed back some wandering lock of gold.

In this careless attitude she recalled to the mind those slender figures of Greek maidens at their toilette, pictured on some of the ancient vases, whose pure and soft contour and fresh young beauty no artist has been able to reproduce. She was a thousand times lovelier thus than in the garden of the villa Salviati at Florence, and, if Octave had not already been madly in love with her, he would

certainly have become so ; but to the infinite nothing can be added.

At the sight of her, however, Octave-Labinski felt the sensations he might have experienced on beholding some terrible spectacle ; his knees trembled and gave way beneath him. His mouth grew dry, and a convulsive pang choked him like a Thugg's hand ; deep red fires shot about his eyes. This perfect beauty overwhelmed him, and left him nerveless and powerless. He made a great effort to recall his courage, telling himself that these foolish fears and sensations, though they might suit a rejected lover, were perfectly ridiculous in a husband, however much in love with his wife he might be, and he advanced with apparent boldness towards the countess.

"Ah ! it is you, Olaf, how late you were in coming home to-night," said the countess, without turning her head, which the long plaits at which the maids were employed held in a fixed position, but holding out to him one of her beautiful hands, which she disengaged from the folds of her burnous.

Octave-Labinski seized this hand—sweeter and fresher than any flower—and carried it to his lips, burning into it one long feverish kiss ; his whole soul concentrating itself upon that one little spot.

We do not know what delicate sensitiveness, what instinct of divinest modesty, what distrustful intuition, sounded a warning note in Prascovie's heart ; but a rosy flush rushed suddenly across her face, her neck, and her arms, suffusing them with the blushing tints of the virgin snow of the Alpine peaks surprised by the sun's awakening kiss. She quivered as she drew back her hand ; partly with vexation, partly with shame. Octave's lips seemed to have burned her like hot iron. However, she quickly recovered herself and smiled at her own waywardness.

"You do not answer me, dear Olaf ; do you know that it is more than six hours since I saw you ; you are neglecting me," she said reproachfully ; "you would not at one time have left me alone through a whole long evening. Tell me, did you think of me ?"

"Perpetually," replied Octave-Labinski.

"Oh ! no ; not perpetually. I know when you are thinking of me, even when you are far away. This evening, for example, I was seated at the piano playing some of Weber's music to soothe my loneliness. For a few minutes I felt your spirit hovering around me in the sonorous whirl of the notes. Then, just as I struck the last chord, it flew away, I don't know where, and it never returned again. Don't tell me stories ; I am quite sure of what I say."

Prascovie, indeed, was not mistaken. It was at that moment that, at Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau's house, Count Olaf Labinski had bent over the glass of magic water, calling up the image of her he loved by the force of a concentrated will. From that time the count, submerged beneath the unfathomable depths of his mesmeric slumber, had been capable of no ideas, or thoughts, or wishes.

The maids, having completed their duties, retired. Octave-Labinski still remained standing, covering Prascovie with his feverish glance. Discomposed and scorched, as it were, by this continued gaze, the countess wrapped herself round with the folds of her burnous, like a draped Polyhymnia. Her head alone appeared outside the blue and white folds, beautiful, but bearing an expression of uneasiness.

Though no human penetration could have divined the mysterious interchange of souls which had been effected

by Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, through the power of the formula revealed to him by the sannyâsi Brahma Logum, Prascovie did not recognise in Octave-Labinski's eyes the expression that was habitual to those of Olaf—the expression of a love that was pure calm, equable, and eternal as the love of the angels. This gaze of Octave-Labinski's glowed with an earthy passion, and it troubled her and called up a blush to her cheek. She could not explain to herself what change had taken place, but she felt quite sure that there had been some change. A thousand wild ideas coursed through her brain. Had she become for Olaf a mere commonplace woman, to be desired only for her beauty? Had the sublime harmony of their souls been broken and marred by some discord, of which she knew nothing? Did Olaf love some one else? Could the corruption of Paris have tainted his once so chaste soul? She ran rapidly over these questions in her mind, without being able to find any satisfactory answer, and asked herself was she indeed mad; but, at the bottom of her heart, she felt that she was right. A secret terror seized upon her, as though she were assailed by some unknown danger, unknown, indeed, but divined by that spiritual second-sight which one is ever wrong in disregarding.

She rose from her seat, trembling with a nervous agitation, and walked towards the door of her bedroom. The false count accompanied her, his hand on her waist; but when she reached the door, she turned round and stood for a moment, pale and cold as a statue, and, casting a glance of terror upon the young man, stepped quickly into her room, hurriedly closed the door, and shot the bolt into its socket.

"It was Octave's look!" she cried to herself, as she

sank, half-fainting, on to a couch. When she had regained her self-possession, she asked herself, "How comes it that that look of Octave's, whose expression I have never forgotten, is gleaming to-night in Olaf's eyes? Why does my husband's gaze burn with that gloomy and despairing glow that I remember so well? Can Octave be dead? Can it be that it was his soul which was gleaming upon me for a few last moments before quitting this earth for ever? Olaf! Olaf! If I have deceived myself and given way to a foolish, groundless panic, you will pardon me; yet, if I had yielded myself to you to-night, I should have felt that it was not to you, but to another!"

The countess satisfied herself that the door was securely fastened, lighted the lamp which hung from the ceiling, and then buried herself in her bed, like a child overwhelmed with an undefinable terror. It was not till nearly morning that she fell asleep. Wild and incoherent dreams disturbed her rest. Burning eyes—Octave's eyes—glared at her through the darkness, shooting out fiery jets upon her; while, at the foot of the bed, there seemed to crouch a dim and mournful form, ever muttering sadly in some language she could not understand. Count Olaf appeared to her, too, in her troubled dreams, but not in his own likeness.

We shall not attempt to describe Octave's disappointment when he found himself standing before the closed door, and heard the grating of the bolt inside, as it shot into its socket. His soaring hope was dashed to the ground. And after all that he had gone through for the sake of it! He had had recourse to strange and terrible resources; he had yielded himself to a magician, perhaps to a very demon; imperilling his life in this world and his soul in the next, to achieve the conquest of a woman who

had at the last moment succeeded in escaping him, defenceless and given into his hands though she was by Eastern spells. Rejected as her lover, he was still rejected as her husband. Prascovie's invincible purity came off scatheless against the most devilish machinations. On the very threshold of her chamber she had stood, like Swedenborg's white angel, and crushed down the evil one beneath her.

He could not remain all the night in this ridiculous situation. He set off in search of the count's room, and, at the end of a suite of apartments, he came to one which contained a bed with ebony pillars and tapestry curtains, richly embroidered with the Labinski blazon amid floriated ornaments and arabesques. Trophies of Eastern arms, cuirasses and helmets, faintly reflecting the lamp light, glowed vaguely in the shadow. Three or four great carved arm-chairs and a chest, studded all over with little figures, completed the furniture of the room, furniture that was altogether feudal in its taste and appearance, and would have been perfectly in place in the lofty hall of some ancient Gothic castle. It was no mere frivolous affectation of antiquity by the count, but a pious memorial. The room was an exact copy of one which had formerly been his mother's, and, though he had often had to bear his friends' raillery at its antiquated arrangement, he had always refused to allow it to be altered.

Octave-Labinski, thoroughly worn out by fatigue and excitement, threw himself upon the bed, and went to sleep, cursing Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau. Happily the morning-light brought him more smiling thoughts. He resolved to conduct himself, in the future, in a more restrained fashion, to moderate the ardour of his expression, and to bear himself more like a husband. Assisted by

the count's valet, he dressed himself and then walked quietly into the dining-room, where the countess, no doubt, would expect him at breakfast.

CHAPTER X.

OCTAVE-LABINSKI kept carefully behind the valet on his way to the dining-room, for he did not know whereabouts in the house, which owned him as its master, it was situated. It was a large and lofty room on the ground-floor, looking on to the courtyard, and of a style that reminded one of both castle and abbey ; magnificent yet chaste and severe. Wainscotting of a rich brown oak, divided into symmetrical panels and compartments, reached up to the ceiling, whose beams were arranged in hexagons, ornamented with gold arabesques on a blue ground. On the lofty panels of the wainscotting were symbolical paintings of the four seasons ; not mythological impersonations, but trophies of those productions of Nature by which they are respectively marked. Pictures of hunting scenes hung between these groups of still-life, and over each painting there was suspended an immense *plat* by Bernard Palissy or Leonard de Limoges, or one of Japanese porcelain or majolica or Arab pottery, bright with every colour of the rainbow. Amidst these were also hung several stags' heads and buffalo horns. At both ends of the room were lofty sideboards, which rivalled in their form and decorative details, the finest work of mediæval or modern art. Upon them glittered in bright confusion the ancient plate of the Labinski family ; ewers with fantastical handles, antique salt-cellars, bowls, cups,

epergnes of quaint German design. In front of this old work, shone marvellous products of the art of the modern silversmith ; figured enamel tea-caddies, salvers, wine jugs with handles of silver vine leaves, and girdled by dancing Bacchantes ; chafing-dishes, elegantly designed as those of old Pompeii, to say nothing of the Bohemian and Venetian glass and the services of old Saxony and Sèvres-ware.

Carved oak chairs, seated with green morocco leather, were ranged against the walls. Upon the table, whose feet were carved into eagles' claws, fell a flood of soft and equable light through the ground-glass which covered the vacant hexagon in the centre of the ceiling. A transparent circle of vine leaves garlanded this milky expanse of glass with its green foliage. Upon the table, the dishes were awaiting, beneath their polished metal covers, the pleasure of those who were to enjoy them. The stands of fruit were wreathed with violets. A Russian tea-urn hissed out its steamy jets. Two footmen stood silent and motionless behind the two chairs, which were placed opposite to each other like two statues raised to domesticity.

Octave grasped all these details in a quick glance of examination, that he might not afterwards have his attention involuntarily distracted by examining objects with which he ought to be familiar.

A slight rustling sound fell upon his ears, and he turned his head. It was Countess Prascovie Labinska entering the room. She advanced to the table and seated herself opposite to him with a little affectionate gesture. She wore a dressing-gown of green and white silk check. Her hair clustered in thick bands over her temples, and flowed back upon her neck in a golden curve like the volute of an ionic capital—a coiffure as simple as it was beautiful, in

which a Greek sculptor would have found nothing to change. The soft tints of her complexion were a little paled by the emotions of the past night and her troubled sleep. An almost imperceptible pearly aureole rimmed those eyes which were usually so calm and pure. She looked tired and languid ; but her beauty was none the less striking. She had assumed something of humanity ; the goddess had become a woman ; the angel had folded her wings and ceased straining after the skies.

More prudent than on the previous night, Octave veiled the fire in his eyes, and masked his silent ecstasy with an air of indifference.

The countess stretched her little foot in its slipper of reddish brown leather upon the silky fleece of the rug, which was laid under the table to soften the cold touch of the white marble mosaic, shrugged her shoulders slightly, as though she felt a draught, and fixing her beautiful blue eyes upon him whom she took for her husband (for the morning light had swept away all the presentiments and terrors and phantoms of the night), she addressed to him in a voice that was full of harmony and tenderness a sentence in Polish. When alone with the count, or in the presence of her French servants, to whom it was quite unintelligible, she would occasionally speak to him in their dear native tongue.

The Parisian Octave knew Latin, Italian, Spanish, and a few words of English, but he was entirely ignorant of the Slavonic languages. The *chevaux de frise* of consonants which guards the rare vowels in Polish words would have been sufficient to deter him, even if he had ever felt any inclination to study the language. At Florence the countess had always spoken either French or Italian, and the thought of learning the tongue in which Mickiewicz

has earned a glory almost equal to Byron's, had never entered his mind. One can't foresee everything.

The sound of this sentence uttered by Prascovie had a very singular effect upon the brain of the body in which Octave's soul was dwelling. The vibrations, quite strange to the Parisian, passing through the folds of a Slavonic brain, reached the spot where Olaf's soul generally met them to translate them into thoughts and meaning, and they called up there a kind of physical memory. Some vague glimmering of their sense seemed to strike Octave. Words that were buried within his cerebral convolutions and stowed away at the bottom of the secret drawers of his memory, stirred themselves up confusedly, as though waiting to be marshalled in order and spoken; but these misty reminiscences, being out of all sympathy with the mind, quickly faded away, and all became dark and blank. The embarrassment of the unfortunate lover was painful to witness. He had never dreamed of the possibility of such a complication as this when he appropriated the body of the Count Olaf Labinski; and he now found out that, in his desire to appear in another man's likeness, he had exposed himself to the risk of tiresome discomposure.

Prascovie, surprised at Octave's silence, but supposing that, absorbed in some reverie, he had not heard her, repeated her words slowly and in louder tones.

Though he heard the syllables more distinctly, the false count did not understand one whit the better what they meant. He made desperate attempts to extract some glimmer of meaning from their sound, but, for those who know them not, the compact languages of the North are hopelessly dark and unintelligible; and though a Frenchman may make some guess as to what an Italian is talking about, he might just as well be deaf when he listens to

Pole. In spite of himself, a burning blush flew to Octave's cheeks ; he bit his lips ; and, in an attempt to appear more at his ease, he began energetically to cut up the meat on his plate.

"Really, one would think, my dear Olaf," said the countess, this time speaking in French, "that you don't hear me, or that you don't understand——"

"Well, you know," stammered out Octave-Labinski, hardly knowing what he was saying, "that confounded language is so difficult."

"Difficult ! yes, for foreigners perhaps it is ; but for one who has lisped it on his mother's knees, it flows from the lips like the very breath of life itself, quickly, almost, as thought."

"No doubt ; but still there are times when I seem to have forgotten it."

"What nonsense are you talking, Olaf ? *You* forget it ! forget the language of your ancestors, the language of our beloved country, the language which points out to you your brothers among men ; and," she added, in lower tones, "the language in which you first told me that you loved me !"

"The habit of speaking in another tongue——" stammered Olaf, who could not think of any other excuse.

"Olaf," the countess interrupted, reproachfully, "I am afraid that Paris has corrupted you. I was right in not wishing to come here. Who could have guessed, indeed, that, when the noble Count Labinski returned to his own estates, he would no longer be able to reply to the congratulations of his vassals ?"

Prascovie's charming face was clouded with an expression of pain. For the first time sorrow had thrown its shadow over that brow of angelic serenity. This

singular forgetfulness on the part of her husband chilled her very heart, and seemed to her almost like a treason.

The rest of the breakfast was eaten in silence. Prascovie was not pleased with him whom she took to be her husband, while Octave was in a state of mental agony, fearing lest he might be asked other questions to which he would be quite unable to reply.

The countess rose from the table and retired to her own room.

Octave, left alone, began playing with the handle of a knife, and felt inclined to stab himself to the heart, for his position had become almost intolerable. He had reckoned upon an immediate victory; and now he found himself lost in the mazy labyrinth of another man's existence, out of which he could find no way. In stealing Count Olaf Labinski's body, he ought also to have possessed himself of his thoughts and views; of the languages which he spoke; of his childish recollections; of the thousand little private matters which go to the making up of a man's personality; the threads which unite his existence with the existences of others; but for all this the skill of Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau had been insufficient. The misery it was to be in this paradise, and yet not to dare to take one single step forward! To be living under the same roof with Prascovie, to see her, to speak to her, to kiss her dear hand with her husband's lips, and yet not to be able to beguile that celestial purity of hers, and to fear every instant lest he should betray himself by some stupidity which he would not be able to explain! "It has been written above," mused he, "that Prascovie should never love me, and yet I have made the greatest sacrifice to which human pride can condescend: I have renounced

my own identity and consented, under another's form, to receive an affection which is meant for that other one ! ”

He was thus soliloquising when a groom entered the room and, bowing before him with every sign of the most profound respect, asked him which horse he would ride that morning.

Obtaining no reply, the groom made bold, though he trembled at his own presumption, to murmur—

“Vulture or Rustem ? Neither has been out for the last week.”

“Rustem,” answered Octave-Labinski ; the last name only had lingered in his preoccupied mind.

He mounted the horse and set off for the Bois de Boulogne, hoping to allay his nervous excitement in the fresh air. Rustem, a magnificent arabian, who carried on his breast in a little gold-embroidered velvet bag his noble pedigree mounting back to the first years of the hegira, had no need of the spur. He seemed to understand his rider's thoughts ; and as soon as he had got away from the paved streets and on to the softer ground, he shot along like an arrow, without even a touch of Octave's spur. After a couple of hours of furious riding, the rider and his horse returned to the Hotel Labinski ; the one calmed and refreshed, the other steaming and with reddened nostrils.

The fictitious count sought the countess, whom he found in her own room, wearing a thin white silk dress, flounced up to the waist, for it was Thursday, the day on which she remained at home and received her friends.

“Well,” she said to him, with a beaming smile, for displeasure could not remain with her for long, “have you found your memory again in your ride among the trees ? ”

“No, indeed, my dear,” replied Octave-Labinski ; “but there is something I must confess to you.”

"Don't I know all your thoughts before you utter them? Are we not quite transparent, the one to the other?"

"I went yesterday to see that physician about whom every one is talking."

"You mean Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau? He who has lived so long in India, and has learned, they say, a host of marvellous secrets, each more wonderful than the other. You wanted to take me there too, but I am not curious about him; for I know that you love me, and that knowledge is quite sufficient for me."

"He performed such strange experiments before me, and worked such marvellous wonders, that my mind is still unsettled with them. This extraordinary man, whose power seems to be quite irresistible, threw me into a mesmeric sleep so deep that, when I awoke from it again, I no longer found myself in possession of all my former faculties. I had forgotten many things. The past seemed all to be wrapped in a thick fog. My love for you is all that remains unaffected."

"You were wrong, Olaf, to submit yourself to the power of this man. God, who created the soul of man, has the right to work it as He wills, but man, when he attempts to interfere with it, commits an impiety," said the countess, gravely. "I hope you will not go to him any more, and that when I again say anything nice to you—in Polish—you will be able to understand me as you used to do."

Octave had invented this excuse of mesmerism during his ride in order to account for any slip he might make in his new personality; but he had not yet got to the end of his troubles. A servant opened the door and announced a visitor.

"Monsieur Octave de Saville."

Though he knew that this meeting must inevitably one day or other take place, the real Octave's countenance

blanched at these words as though the trumpet blast heralding the last judgment had blared in his ear. He had need of all his courage, and what consolation there was to be obtained from telling himself that he was master of the situation, to keep himself from sinking to the ground with a horrible faintness. He instinctively clasped his fingers upon the back of a couch, and thus succeeded in being able to continue standing, and to maintain an appearance of undisturbed composure.

Count Olaf, wearing the outward guise of Octave, advanced towards the countess, whom he saluted with a profound bow.

"Monsieur le Comte Labinski—Monsieur Octave de Saville," said the countess, introducing the gentlemen to each other.

The two men bowed to one another coldly, while glances of fierce suspicion shot through the masks of drawing-room courtesy ; masks which so often cover the fiercest passion.

"You have treated me very badly since I saw you at Florence, Monsieur Octave," said the countess in familiar and friendly tones, "and I was afraid that I was going to leave Paris without seeing you. You were much more sociable at the villa Salviati, and I reckoned you then amongst the number of my intimate friends."

"Madame," the fictitious Octave replied, in a reserved voice, "I have been travelling, and I have been very ill ; and when I received your gracious invitation, I hesitated as to whether I should take advantage of it, for one should not be selfish enough to abuse one's friends' kindness to a wearisome invalid."

"Weary, perhaps ; but certainly not wearisome," answered the countess ; "you have always been given to melancholy ; but does not one of your poets say that, after idleness, melancholy is the best of evils ?"

"That is a story which happy people set in circulation to excuse themselves from pitying their suffering brothers," said Olaf-de-Saville.

The countess glanced at the count, hidden in the form of Octave, with an expression of ineffable tenderness, as if she were asking pardon for the love with which she had involuntarily inspired him.

"You imagine me less serious than I really am ; all true grief has my pity, and, if I cannot assuage it, I, at least, know how to sympathise with it. I should be very glad to see you happy, my dear Monsieur Octave ; but why do you shut yourself up with your trouble, obstinately secluding yourself from life, with its chances of happiness, its pleasures and its duties ? Why have you held yourself aloof from the friendship which I offer you ?"

These words of the countess, so simple and frank, had a very different effect upon her two listeners. Octave heard in them the confirmation of the sentence pronounced in the garden of the villa Salviati by those lips which falsehood had never stained, while Olaf read in them one proof more of his wife's unalterable virtue, which only these devilish wiles could circumvent. A sudden passionate anger filled him as he saw his body thus occupied and animated by a stranger-soul, and he sprang at the throat of the false count, crying,

"Thief, robber, scoundrel, give me back my body !"

At this extraordinary and astounding outburst, the countess flew to the bell-rope, and her servants quickly carried the count out of the room.

"The poor fellow has gone mad," said Prascovie, as the men removed the simulated Octave, who was struggling violently.

"Yes," replied the veritable Octave, "mad with love ! you are really too beautiful, countess !"

CHAPTER XI.

Two hours after this scene, the false count received from the genuine one a letter sealed with the seal of Octave de Saville ; the unhappy man had no other at his service. The breaking open of a letter sealed with his own crest produced a very singular effect upon the usurper of Olaf Labinski's identity, but his abnormal position was, indeed, full of singularities.

The letter contained the following lines, written in a crabbed hand, that had the appearance of being disguised, for Olaf had not yet learned to write easily with Octave's fingers :—

“ Read by any other than you, this letter would seem as though it should have been dated from a madhouse, but to you it will be intelligible enough. An inexplicable combination of circumstances, which have never, probably, happened before since this earth began to wheel round the sun, compels me to an action which no man has ever previously taken. I am writing to myself and am addressing this letter to a name which is my own name—a name which you have stolen from me along with my body. Of what hellish machinations I am the victim, I know not ; within what sphere of infernal illusions and deceptions I have entered, I cannot tell ; but you, doubtless, you know too well. This secret, if you are not a coward, the barrel of my pistol or the point of my sword will demand of you in a place where every man, be he a man of honour or a scoundrel, answers the questions which are asked him.

“ To-morrow one or other of us must take his last look at the light of the sun. This world, wide as it is, has now

become too narrow to hold both of us. I will slay my body, which is now the home of your traitor-soul, or you shall slay your own, unworthy to be the prison-house of my spirit. Do not attempt to make me out a madman. I shall have the courage to be calm and rational; and, wherever I meet you, I will insult you with the courteous scorn of a gentleman, with the contemptuous coolness of a diplomatist. I hope that what I have written, obscure as it may seem, will have no ambiguity for you, and that my seconds and yours will have no difficulty in coming to an immediate understanding as to the time, the place, and the conditions of our meeting."

This letter threw Octave into a state of great perplexity. He could not refuse to accept the count's challenge, and yet the thought of fighting himself was very distasteful to him, for he still preserved a certain affection for his old envelope. The reflection that he would certainly be coerced into this meeting by some degrading public insult at last decided him to accept the challenge, although he might, perhaps, as a last resort, have had his adversary confined in an asylum on the grounds of his evident insanity, and thus stayed him from any further attack; but he shrank from such a strong-handed proceeding as this. For though carried away by his absorbing passion he had lent himself to the baseness of stealing the husband's body and hiding the lover within it, that he might triumph over a virtue which was unassailable by any other means, he was still not entirely destitute of honour and courage; and it was only after three years of suffering and struggling with his passion at a moment when his life, worn out by his love, was quickly perishing, that he had taken this last desperate step. He had not known the count. He was no friend of

his ; he owed him nothing, and he had availed himself of the dangerous scheme which Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau had suggested to him.

Where was he to find his seconds ? Some of the count's friends, no doubt, would be willing to act for him, but Octave, during the single day that he had occupied the Hotel Labinski, had had no opportunity of becoming acquainted with any of them.

On the mantelpiece were two cups of sea-green crackle with gold handles. In one of them were some rings, pins, seals, and other small articles. The other contained visiting cards on which, under the coronets of dukes, marquises, counts in various styles of engraving, were inscribed a crowd of names, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, German, Italian, Spanish, testifying to the wandering life of the count, who had friends in every country.

Octave picked out two of them at random ; Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda. He ordered his carriage and set out to call upon them. He found them both at home. They manifested no surprise at the request of the man they took for Count Olaf Labinski. They did not even ask if it were not possible that the matter might be compromised, but observed a complete silence as to the cause of the meeting, like the high-bred noblemen they were.

On his side, the genuine count, or, if you prefer it, the fictitious Octave, found himself in a like perplexity. He recalled to mind Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud, and the breakfast at which he had declined to be present, and he resolved to secure their services. The two young men exhibited some little surprise at finding their friend, who for more than a year had scarcely left his room, and whose temperament they knew to be rather peaceable than

bellicose, involved in a duel ; but when he told them that he was bound to fight to the death for a cause which he was not at liberty to explain to them, they made no further objections and retired to present themselves at the Hotel Labinski.

The conditions of the meeting were quickly settled. A coin thrown into the air was to settle what weapons were to be used, both parties having declared that either pistols or swords would suit them equally well. They were to meet in the Bois de Boulogne at six o'clock in the morning, in the Avenue des Poteaux, near the little rustic cottage, in a place which was free from trees, and where the smooth gravel afforded a suitable stage for the drama they had in view.

When the arrangements were finally agreed upon, it was nearly midnight, and Octave bent his steps towards the door of Prascovie's room. As on the previous night, the bolt was shot, and the mocking voice of the countess cried scoffingly through the securely fastened door,—

“Come back again when you can understand Polish. I am too patriotic to receive a foreigner.”

In the morning Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, whom Octave had, by letter, requested to come, arrived with a case of surgical instruments and a bundle of lint for bandages. They got into a carriage together, and Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda followed them in a second one.

“Well, my dear Octave,” began the doctor, “so this adventure of yours is already inclining towards tragedy ? I ought to have left the count to sleep on, in your body, for a week on my couch. I have produced mesmeric slumber for even longer periods than that. But it is in vain that one has studied wisdom amongst the brahmins and the

pundits and the sannyâsies of India ; one always seems to overlook something that ought to have been done, and the most carefully planned scheme is marred with some imperfection. But tell me how Countess Prascovie received her Florentine lover in his present disguise ? ”

“ I believe,” answered Octave, “ that she recognised me in spite of my transformation ; or perhaps some protecting angel may have whispered in her ear a warning word of distrust. I have found her icy, chaste, and pure as the Polar snows. Beneath the form which she loves, doubtless her exquisite spirit guessed that a stranger-soul lay lurking. I told you that you could do nothing for me. I am now even more wretched than when you first visited me.”

“ Who can assign any limits to the faculties of the soul,” said Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, “ especially when it is not debased by any earthly desires or soiled by the mud of humanity, but keeps itself pure as it left its Creator’s hands ? Yes, you are right, she has recognised you. Her angelic modesty has shuddered beneath your carnal gaze, and has instinctively sheltered itself beneath its snowy wings. I pity you, my poor Octave ; your disease is, indeed, incurable. If we were living in the Middle Ages, I should say to you, ‘ Become a monk.’ ”

“ I have often thought about doing so,” replied Octave.

By this time they had reached their destination. The carriage of the fictitious Octave was drawn up near the spot which had been chosen for the meeting.

At this early hour the Bois de Boulogne was bright with a beauty of which the fashionable crowd, by-and-bye about to invade it, would deprive it later on in the day. It was sufficiently early in the summer for the leaves to be still fresh and to have the brightness of their green yet unscorched by the sun’s heat. The thick foliage of varied

tint and shade, still glittering with last night's dew, rustled gently in the morning air, and cast abroad a soft delicate perfume. At this particular spot, the trees were exceptionally fine, either because they had found a soil which was specially adapted to their requirements, or because they were the sole and sturdy survivors of some ancient plantation. Their massive trunks, coated with moss or gleaming with silvery bark, anchored themselves to the ground with their gnarled and knotted roots, and threw out branches which bent and twisted themselves in a fashion that would have served as valuable models for artists in search of out-of-the-way effects. A few birds chirped gaily amongst the boughs, and a startled rabbit cleared the gravel of the pathway in three bounds, and sped away to hide itself in the grass, at the sound of the carriage wheels.

These charms of Nature, disturbed at her toilette, gained, however, as you may suppose, but little attention from the two combatants and their seconds.

The appearance of Doctor Cherbonneau had an unpleasant effect upon Count Olaf Labinski, but he very quickly recovered his composure.

The swords were measured, and the combatants' positions were assigned to them. The duellists quickly threw off their coats and stood on their guard. The seconds shouted "Begin."

In every duel, whatever be the animosity between the combatants, there is always a moment of solemn quiescence. Each of the two men silently studies his adversary and forms his plan, anticipating attacks, and contriving parries to meet them. Then the blades clash against each other, playing and trying with each other, as it were, for a little time without separating. This lasts for

only a few seconds, but they seem like minutes or hours to the anxious excited seconds.

In the present case, the conditions of the duel, to the spectators apparently so commonplace, were to the two combatants themselves so strange and marvellous, that they lingered on their guard for some time longer than is usual. Each of them, indeed, saw before him his own body, and was making ready to plunge his blade into flesh which not many hours before had been his own flesh. The fight now seemed to have become rather a kind of suicide, and brave as they were, both Octave and the count felt an instinctive horror at finding themselves, sword in hand, in front of their own phantoms, and ready to fall upon and slay their very selves.

The impatient seconds were on the point of again crying out, "Gentlemen, begin," when the blades clashed together.

A few attacks were quickly made, and parried on one side and the other.

The count, thanks to his military training, was a skilful swordsman. He had pierced the guard of the most celebrated teachers ; but, though he still retained all his science, he had no longer the muscular arm, which had cut down many a follower of Schamyl from his saddle, to put it in execution ; his sword was held only in the puny grasp of Octave de Saville.

On the other hand, Octave, in the count's body, felt himself possessed of a strength he had never known before, and, though not so clever a fencer, he was quite able to ward off from his breast the point of the sword that sought to bury itself in it.

It was in vain that Olaf endeavoured to pierce his adversary's guard. Octave, cooler and stronger, parried all his attacks.

The count began to grow angry, and his swordsmanship became excited and irregular. Even if he were obliged to remain Octave de Saville, he would have liked to kill this cheat of a body which might deceive Prascovie; a thought which filled him with an inexpressible rage.

At the risk of being himself transfixed by his enemy's blade, he essayed a fierce thrust by which he hoped to let out of his own body, the life and soul of his rival; but Octave's sword twisted itself round his own with a movement so quick and irresistible, that the blade, wrested out of his grasp, spun up into the air and fell down again upon the ground several paces away.

Olaf's life was now at Octave's mercy. The count's face grew rigid, not because he was afraid of death, but because he thought he was going to leave his wife a prey to this body-snatcher, who would henceforth be safe from all detection.

Octave, far from taking advantage of the situation, threw down his sword, and waving back the seconds, stepped up to the amazed count, whom he took by the arm and led away into the depths of the wood.

"What do you want with me?" asked the count. "Why didn't you kill me when you had the chance of doing so? Why not have continued the duel, after having allowed me to pick up my sword, if you disdained to strike a defenceless man? You know full well that the sun can go on no longer casting both our shadows on the gravel here, and that the earth must cover one or other of us."

"Hear me patiently," replied Octave. "Your happiness is in my hands. I can keep for ever this body in which my soul is dwelling to-day, and which, in strict fairness, belongs to you; for so much I do not mind confessing now that no one can overhear me, excepting the birds, who are

not tale-bearers. If we resume our duel, I shall kill you. Count Olaf Labinski, whom I represent as creditably as I am able, is a much stronger swordsman than Octave de Saville, whose body you now own, and which, greatly to my regret, I shall be obliged to destroy; and Octave de Saville's death, though not a real one—since my soul would still live on in your body—would overwhelm my mother with grief."

The count, recognising the truth of these observations, preserved a silence which seemed to signify acquiescence in them.

"You will never succeed," continued Octave, "in re-assuming your own individuality, so long as I am opposed to your doing so. You know the result of your two previous attempts. Any further endeavours to do so will simply cause you to be confined as a monomaniac. No one will believe a single word of your protestations, and, when you claim to be Count Olaf Labinski, every one will laugh in your face, as, perhaps, you have already found out by experience. You will be shut up in an asylum, and you will spend the rest of your days in protesting, under a discipline of douche baths, that you are certainly the husband of the beautiful Countess Prascovie Labinska. Compassionate souls, when they hear you, will say, 'Poor Octave.' You will be for ever disbelieved and ignored like Balzac's Chabert, who persisted in asserting that he was not dead."

This was all so demonstrably true, that the overwhelmed count could only let his head hang down upon his breast and keep silence.

"Since you are at present Octave de Saville, you have, doubtless, searched his drawers and examined his papers, and you will not be ignorant of the fact that for three years he has been madly and hopelessly in love with the Countess

Prascovie Labinska ; that he has vainly tried to tear out this love of his from his heart ; a love which will never leave him, save with his life, even if it does not cling to him in the very tomb itself."

"Yes, I know all that," said the count, biting his lips.

"Well, to win her, I have had recourse to a horrible, a fearful scheme ; a scheme whose perils only a passion mad as mine dared have risked. Doctor Cherbonneau has worked on my behalf a wonder, before which all the thaumaturgists of every land and every age would have sunk down in amazement. After having plunged us both in a profound slumber, he, by his mesmeric art, interchanged the two souls which occupied our two bodies. Useless, unavailing miracle ! I am going to give you back your body. Prascovie does not love me. In her husband's body she divined her lover's soul. Her look was cold and loveless on the threshold of her bed-chamber as in the garden of the villa Salviati."

Octave's accents betrayed so genuine and heart-felt a sorrow that the count could not but believe what he said.

"I am a lover," continued Octave, with a smile, "but not a thief ; and, since the only blessing which I have longed for upon this earth, can never be mine, I see no reason why I should cling to your titles, your castles, your estates, your wealth, your horses, and your escutcheon. Come, give me your arm ; let us appear to be reconciled again. We will thank our seconds, and take Doctor Cherbonneau with us, and go together to his magic laboratory which we left, a little while ago, transfigured and metamorphosed : the old brahmin will be able to undo his own work."

"Gentlemen," said Octave, enacting for a few minutes longer the part of Count Olaf Labinski, "my late opponent and myself have exchanged confidential explanations which

render the resumption of our duel unnecessary. Nothing clears up the mistakes into which honest men have fallen so well as a little sword-play."

Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda entered their carriage again, and Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud did the like. Count Olaf Labinski, Octave de Saville, and Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau drove at full gallop towards the Rue du Regard.

CHAPTER XII.

WHILE they were being driven from the Bois de Boulogne to the Rue du Regard, Octave de Saville said to Doctor Cherbonneau,

"My dear doctor, I am going to put your skill to the test again. You must restore our souls to their old domiciles once more. You ought not to find it a very difficult task. I hope that Monsieur le Comte will forgive you for having made him exchange his palace for a hovel, and for having had to bestow for a few hours his distinguished personality in my poor frame. You are powerful enough besides, to stand in no fear of any man's vengeance."

Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau bowed acquiescence, and then went on to say, "The operation will be much simpler this time than the one we previously performed. The imperceptible filaments which tie the body and soul together have been so recently broken that they will not have had time to knot themselves firmly together again, and your wills will not now oppose the mesmerizer with the instinctive resistance of the mesmerized. Monsieur le Comte will doubtless pardon an old philosopher like myself for not

having been able to resist the temptation of performing an operation for which one can rarely find subjects, seeing that the experiment has only served to conspicuously confirm a virtue whose delicacy reaches even to divination, and triumphs where any other would have succumbed. You may look upon this temporary transformation as a dream, and perhaps the time may come when you will not regret having undergone the strange experience, one which very few men have known, of occupying two bodies. Metempsychosis is not a new doctrine, but, before entering upon a new phase of existence, the souls drink deeply of the cup of oblivion, and it is not every one who, like Pythagoras, can remember having fought in the Trojan war."

"If you will kindly re-install me in my own individuality," the count answered politely, "you will compensate me for the inconvenience which my expropriation has caused me; if I may say that without appearing rude to Monsieur Octave de Saville, who I still am, though not I trust for much longer."

Octave smiled with the lips of Count Labinski at this remark, and then silence fell upon the three men, to whom their peculiar situation rendered conversation difficult.

The unhappy Octave gave himself up to thoughts of his vanished hopes, and it must be confessed that his reflections were not cheerful ones. Like all rejected lovers he continued to ask himself why he could not win the love he longed for—as though love knows any *whys*, its only reason being ever a *because*; which, too, is woman's favourite answer to every embarrassing question. He felt that now, indeed, he had nothing more to hope for, and that the mainspring of his life, which Doctor Cherbonneau had been able to set working again for a few hours, was once

more and finally broken, as though his heart had been a watch roughly dashed upon the ground. Octave was loth to pain his mother by suicide, and he was considering how it would be possible to quietly set at rest for ever his heart's grief under the appearance of some plausible disease. If he had been a painter, or a poet, or a musician he would have crystallized his fatal love in master-pieces ; and Prascovie, white-robed and star-crowned, like Dante's Beatrice, would have animated and soared through his inspirations like an angel of light ; but, as we have already said at the beginning of this narrative, Octave, though naturally able and clever, was not one of those select minds which leave behind them a lasting trace of their sojourn in this world. His soul, but dimly sublime, knew only how to love and to die.

The carriage passed into the courtyard of the old house in the Rue du Regard, with its pavement bordered with green grass, over which the steps of visitors had worn a track. The lofty grey buildings which hemmed it round buried it in shadows cold as those that fall from the arcades of a lonely cloister. Silence and motionlessness frowned over it, like two invisible statues, to guard from disturbance the meditations of its master. Octave and the count stepped out of the carriage, while the doctor jumped down with a nimble agility scarcely to have been expected in a man of his age, without availing himself of the footman's arm, which was offered to him with the politeness that is affected by the servants of great houses towards the weak and old.

As soon as the folding-doors had closed behind them, Olaf and Octave felt themselves surrounded by that close air which recalled to the doctor the atmosphere of India, and in which only himself could breathe freely, suffocating

as it was to everyone who had not, as he had, been scorched and roasted by thirty years of tropical suns. The incarnations of Vishnu still leered from their frames, looking even more grotesque in the daylight than they had done in the lamp-light. Siva, the blue god, grinned on his pedestal, and Dourga, biting his thick lip with his blood-hound's teeth shook his chaplet of skulls. The whole place preserved its old look of mystery and magic.

Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau led his two patients into the room where the previous transformation had been effected. He set in motion the glass plate of the electrical machine, stirred the iron rods in the mesmeric trough, opened the apertures of the stoves so as to quickly increase the temperature of the room, read a few lines on papyri, so old as to resemble ancient pieces of bark on the point of falling into the dust, and then, when a few minutes had thus passed away, he said to Octave and the count,

"I am at your service now, gentlemen. Do you wish that we should begin?"

While the doctor was making his preparations, the count was filled with disturbing thoughts.

"When I am buried in slumber, what tricks will this old cockatoo-faced magician, who looks like the devil in person, play with my soul? Will he restore it to my own body or will he carry it off with him to hell? This pretended restoration, which is to give me back my old form and position, may be only some new snare, some treacherous scheme for further sorcery, whose object I cannot guess. However, I can scarcely be worse off than I am. Octave possesses my body; and, as he very truly said this morning, if I were to go about claiming it, in my present guise, I should certainly be looked upon as a madman. Besides, if he had wanted to completely rid himself

of me, he could easily have passed his sword through me. I was disarmed and completely at his mercy. No one could have made any reflections upon him. The forms of the duello were rigidly observed and everything was conducted according to general usage. Come ! let me think of Prascovie, and not give way to these childish fears. Let me dare the only way there is of getting her back."

He and Octave grasped the iron rods which Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau presented to them.

Receiving an overwhelming shock from these metal conductors, charged to the full with the magnetic fluid, the two young men at once fell into a state of trance so profound as to seem like death to anyone who was not aware of its real nature. The doctor made the necessary passes, observed the ordained rites and pronounced the same syllables as he had done on the previous occasion. Soon two little quivering flames hovered over Octave and the count. The doctor conjured back to its old home the soul of Count Olaf Labinski, which followed with rapid flight the direction which the mesmerist pointed out to it.

In the meantime, Octave's soul was slowly disentangling itself from Olaf's body, but, instead of making for its own previous habitation, it soared up into the air, as though rejoicing in its freedom, and seemed unwilling to again imprison itself. The doctor felt himself seized with pity and compassion for this poor soul, fluttering its wings up there, and he asked himself if he would really be doing it any kindness in caging it once more in this vale of misery. During his momentary hesitation the soul was still soaring upwards. Quickly recovering himself from his thoughts, Monsieur Cherbonneau uttered the irresistible monosyllable in a tone of the most imperious authority, and made a pass charged with the strongest influences of his volition ;

but the trembling little gleam had already escaped beyond the sphere of attraction, and, passing through the upper pane of the window, it disappeared.

The doctor ceased from efforts which he knew were unavailing and awoke the count, who could not restrain himself from breaking out into a cry of joy, when he saw his own features reflected from a mirror. He cast a rapid glance over the still motionless body of Octave, as though to convince himself that he was really freed from it and rid of it; and then, kissing Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau's hand, rushed from the room.

A few moments afterwards a carriage was heard rolling away through the archway of the courtyard, and Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau remained alone, face to face with the corpse of Octave de Saville.

"By the trunk of Ganesa!" cried the pupil of the brahmin of Elephanta, when the count had gone, "here is a pretty business! I have opened the cage door and the bird has flown away, and is already far beyond this world's influences; so far that not even the sannyâsi Brahma-Logum himself could lure it back; and I remain here with this corpse upon my hands. I might dissolve it in a corrosive bath of such strength that not a single atom would remain; or, in a few hours, I might turn it into as perfect a mummy as any that are stored in hieroglyphic-painted coffers; but then there would be troublesome enquiries, my rooms would be searched, my closets would be examined, I myself should be submitted to all kinds of wearisome questionings——"

At this point of his reflections, a bright idea shot through the doctor's brain. He seized a pen and hurriedly wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he then locked up in the drawer of his table.

This was what he had written on the paper in question—

“Having no relations, I bequeath all my property to Monsieur Octave de Saville, for whom I have a genuine affection, charging this bequest with the payment of a legacy of a hundred thousand francs to the Brahminical Hospital of Ceylon for old, worn-out and sick animals, and with further yearly payments of annuities of twelve hundred francs each to my Indian servant and my English servant, and I desire Monsieur Octave de Saville to transfer to the guardians of the Mazarine Library my manuscript of the Laws of Manon.”

This will, made by a living man in favour of a dead one, is not one of the least peculiar features of this improbable, yet true, history ; but its apparent strangeness will be explained very shortly.

The doctor laid his hand upon the body of Octave de Saville, from which the vital warmth had not yet altogether fled ; then he glanced in the mirror at the reflection of his own wrinkled face, tanned and rugged as hide, with a strange air of disdain ; and, with a gesture, such as one makes when one casts away an old garment in favour of a new one which the tailor has just brought, he murmured the formula which the sannyâsi Brahma-Logum had taught him.

Immediately the body of Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau fell heavily upon the floor, as though struck by an electric discharge, and the body of Octave de Saville sprang up, full of life and activity.

Octave-Cherbonneau stood for some moments gazing upon the poor worn shell he had just cast off, so scraggy and discoloured, which, now that it was no longer fortified by the powerful soul which, but a few moments ago, was

animating it, exhibited almost immediately the symptoms of extreme senility, and rapidly assumed a cadaverous appearance.

“Adieu, poor mortal rags; thou shabby old garment, that art so out-at-elbows and art worn so threadbare; thou that I have dragged about with me these last seventy years through every quarter of the world, farewell! Thou hast done me good service, and it is not without regret that I part from thee. We have lived so long together, and have learned to know each other so well. But with this young body, which my science will soon know how to make strong and robust, I shall be able to study and to work and to decipher still a few more words of the Great Book, without Death closing it just at the most interesting sentence, and saying, ‘Stop, you have read enough.’”

Having delivered this funeral oration over his own body, Octave-Cherbonneau left the room with steady step to enter upon his new existence.

Count Olaf Labinski had returned to his own house, and had immediately enquired if the countess was at liberty to receive him.

He found her seated on a mossy bank in the conservatory, whose half-opened crystal panels let in a current of soft and sunny air, which floated along through a veritable virgin forest of exotic and tropical plants. The countess was reading Novalis, one of the most subtle, most abstracted and spiritual writers which Germany has produced. She did not care for books which painted life in colours too realistic and glaring—life’s proper tints seemed to her, who had passed her existence in a world of beauty, poetry and love, to be soft and subdued ones.

She threw her book aside, and raised her eyes slowly towards the count. She feared lest she might still meet in

her husband's gaze that feverish, wild expression, full of thoughts which she could not fathom, which had so disturbed her, and which—foolish fear and extravagant imagination—had seemed to her to be the expression of another man! In Olaf's eyes shone a serene joy, and the tranquil fire of a chaste and pure love illumined them. The alien soul, which had lent an alien expression to his features, had fled away for ever. Prascovie immediately knew her adored Olaf again, and a quick flush of joy mounted to her transparent cheeks. Although she could not guess at the transformations which Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau had brought about, her delicate sensitiveness had, unconsciously to herself, marked and noted the successive changes.

"What are you reading here, dear Prascovie?" asked Olaf, as he picked up from its mossy bed, the blue morocco-bound volume. "Ah! the 'History of Henri d'Otterdingen.' It is the very book that I set off hurriedly to get for you at Mohilev, one day when you expressed a wish to have it. At midnight it was lying by the side of your lamp on your table: poor Ralph, though, came back a little broken-winded!"

"And I told you that I would never again express the slightest desire for anything before you. You are like that Spanish grandee who begged his mistress not to look at the stars, since he could not possibly get them for her."

"If you coveted one of them," replied the count, "I would try to scale the heavens to procure it for you."

While the count was speaking, the countess brushed back with her hand a lock of hair that had strayed from its place amidst the glittering aureole that crowned her head. As she thus raised her hand, her sleeve slipped down and uncovered her beautiful arm, round whose wrist

the turquoise-studded lizard which she was wearing when Octave, so fatally to himself, first saw her at the Cascines, twined itself.

"What a scare you once got from that poor little lizard," said the count, "which I killed with a blow of my stick the day when you first, in response to my most earnest entreaties, came to meet me in the garden. I had it mounted in gold and jewelled, but even in its present ornamental condition, you still seemed to stand in fear of it, and it was only after a long time that you could prevail upon yourself to wear it."

"Oh! I have grown quite used to it now; and it is one of my favourite ornaments, for it recalls to me a very dear recollection."

"Yes," continued the count, "it was on that day we agreed that in the morning I should formally ask you in marriage of your aunt."

The countess, who recognised once more the expression and the accents of the true Olaf, and was reassured, too, by the mention of these little private details, rose from her seat, took the count's arm and wandered with him up and down the conservatory; plucking here and there as she went along, with her disengaged hand, a flower whose petals she bit off with her bright lips, like Schiavone's Venus eating roses.

"As your memory seems so good to-day," she said, letting drop the flower she had stripped with her pearly teeth, "you have perhaps recovered your knowledge of your native language, which you couldn't speak yesterday."

"Oh!" replied the count in Polish, "it is in that language that my soul will speak in heaven to tell you that I love you, if it be permitted to souls in paradise to speak in a mortal tongue."

Prascovie, as she walked along, gently leaned her head on Olaf's shoulder.

"Dear heart," she murmured, "now you are as I would have you be. Yesterday you frightened me, and I fled from your presence as though you had been a stranger."

The next day Octave de Saville, animated by the soul of the old doctor, received a black-edged letter inviting him to be present at the funeral of Monsieur Balthazar Cherbonneau.

The doctor, in his new form, followed his poor, worn-out old body to the cemetery, saw himself buried, and listened with a well-simulated air of grief to the orations pronounced over his grave, in which the speakers deplored the irreparable loss which science had just sustained. Then he returned to the Rue Saint-Lazare, and awaited the opening of the will which he had made in his own favour.

That day the evening journals contained the following paragraph:—

"Monsieur le Doctor Balthazar Cherbonneau, so well known from his long residence in India, his philological knowledge and the marvellous cures wrought by him, was yesterday found dead in his laboratory. A careful examination of his body precludes any idea of a crime having been committed. Doctor Cherbonneau has doubtless succumbed to excessive intellectual strain or has fallen a victim to some bold experiment. It is said that, by a holograph testament found in his desk, the doctor has bequeathed some extremely precious manuscript to the Mazarine Library, and has named as his heir a young man of distinguished family, M. O. de S."

JETTATURA.

CHAPTER I.

"**THE LEOPOLD**," a fine Tuscan steamer, plying between Marseilles and Naples, was just doubling the island of Procida. The passengers were all assembled on the bridge, cured of their sea-sickness by the mere sight of land, a specific that is of far more avail than all the medicated lozenges and other nostrums which are recommended to distressed voyagers.

On the portion of the deck set apart for the first-class passengers were several English travellers keeping themselves apart from each other, and wrapping themselves round with an atmosphere of impenetrable reserve. The splenetic faces of the men were carefully shaven, and there was not a crease to be seen on their neckerchiefs; their stiff, white shirt-collars looked as though they were made of Bristol board; their hands were sheathed in bright Suède gloves, and their new boots glittered with the sheeniest varnish. They were so scrupulously neat and trim, and there was such an utter absence from their dress and appearance of all those little carelessnesses and irregularities which are usually noticeable on a sea voyage, that they looked as though they had just been taken out of band-boxes. Amongst them were peers, members of the House of Commons, city merchants, tailors from Regent Street, and master cutlers from Sheffield, all irreproachably dressed, and all looking, in their immoveable reserve, very grave and bored. There were ladies, too, amongst them, for Englishwomen are not such stay-at-home creatures as their sisters of other countries, and avail themselves

of the least pretext for leaving their island home. Together with matrons, whose complexions were fading in the autumn of their beauty, were young girls, with strawberry and cream-tinted faces glowing beneath blue gauze veils, lustrous curls of fair hair, and sharp white teeth, recalling to the mind of the spectator the types of beauty figured in the old "Keepsakes," and justifying the English engravers from the charge of mendaciousness often brought against them. These charming creatures were repeating amongst themselves, in a pretty English accent, the sacramental phrase, "*Vedi Napoli e poi mori*," and consulting their guide-books or making notes of their impressions in their note-books, without paying the slightest heed to the Don Juan glances of several Parisian coxcombs who were prowling about them, while the annoyed matrons declaimed in low tones against French rudeness and impropriety.

Near the confines of the aristocratic quarter-deck three or four young men were pacing about, smoking cigars. Their straw or grey felt hats, their voluminous Inverness capes, studded with huge bone buttons, and their loose duck trousers proclaimed them artists; and this impression was confirmed by their Van Dyck moustaches, and the way in which they wore their hair, curled after the manner of Rubens, or cut after the fashion affected by Paul Veronese. They too, but for a very different purpose from that of the dandies, were trying to catch a glance of the pretty girls whom their thinly-lined purses prevented them from approaching more nearly, and this preoccupation of their minds somewhat distracted their attention from the magnificent panorama which was now unfolding itself before their eyes.

In the fore-part of the ship, leaning against the rails or sitting on coils of rope, were groups of impecunious steerage passengers, engaged in consuming the store of provisions which sea-sickness had hitherto prevented them from touching, without a look for the loveliest scenery in the world; for the appreciation of nature is the privilege of cultivated minds which are not entirely absorbed in the material needs of life. It was a lovely day; the

blue water rose and fell in a gentle swell that was scarcely pronounced enough to efface the track left by the steamer, and the smoke from the funnel formed itself into clouds in the radiant sky and then slowly drifted away in light fleecy puffs. The paddle-boxes were bathed in a sparkling shower of tiny drops of sea-water that glowed iridescent in the sun, while the paddle-wheels churned up the water with a joyous activity that seemed to tell of their consciousness of the nearing land.

The long line of hills from Pausilippo to Vesuvius which fringes that wondrous bay in whose recess Naples lies like a sea-nymph drying herself on the shore, after her bath in ocean, now began to unfold its purple undulations before the eyes of the travellers, and to stand out more distinctly against the deep, bright blue of the heavens; and already several whitish spots, flecking the darker stretches of land, showed where villas lay dotted about the country. Fishing smacks with bellying sails were skimming over the water on their way to port, like swans scudding before the breeze, bearing witness to man's activity in the majestic solitude of the sea. After a few more turns of the paddle-wheels, the Castle of Saint Elmo and the Convent of Saint Martin could be distinctly seen on the summit of the mountain underneath which Naples nestles, towering over the domes of the churches, the terraces of the hotels, the roofs of the houses, the façades of the palaces, and the foliage of the gardens which could as yet be seen only indistinctly in the haze of suffused light. Presently the Château de l'Œuf, resting on its sea-washed rock, seemed to be approaching the steamer, and the pier, with the lighthouse at the end of it, stretched itself out like a huge arm grasping a torch.

At the extremity of the bay, Vesuvius, as the ship neared it, exchanged the bluish tints which it had worn in the distance for deeper and more marked hues. Its sides could now be seen to be furrowed with crevasses and marked by streams of chilled lava; and little jets of white smoke could be very distinctly seen puffing out of its truncated cone as from the holes in a fumigating jar, and trembling in the breeze. The voyagers

could now clearly distinguish Chiatamone, Pizzo Falcone, the quay of Santa Lucia with its line of hotels, the Palazzo Reale with its tiers of balconies, the Palazzo Nuovo, the Arsenal, and vessels of every nation with their masts and spars interlaced in the semblance of a leafless forest. There now emerged from his cabin a passenger who had kept himself invisible during all the previous part of the voyage. It might have been that seasickness had kept him confined to his berth, or perhaps some feeling of surly moroseness had held him aloof from the rest of the company, or it might be that the panorama of the coast, which was new to the majority of the travellers, had lost all interest for him through long familiarity with it.

He was a young man of some six or eight and twenty years of age ; at least, such was the impression caused by a first glance at him, but a closer scrutiny left one in a state of puzzled doubt as to whether he really was not much younger or much older, so perplexingly were freshness and weariness mingled together on his enigmatical countenance. His hair was of that particular tint known as auburn. His features were very finely moulded. The protuberances of his brow would have excited the admiration of a phrenologist ; his nose presented an imposing aquiline curve, his lips were thin and cleanly cut, and the vigorous roundness of his chin aroused reminiscences of antique medals. Yet all these separate features, each beautiful in itself, joined together to form a by no means pleasing whole. There was absent from them that indescribable something which lends a softness to the lines of the face, and makes them melt one into another. The stranger's eyes were especially striking, the black lashes which fringed them contrasting curiously with the pale grey of the pupils and the lustrous chestnut tint of his hair. When they were fixed upon nothing in particular, their moist depths seemed filled with a dreamy melancholy and a languid softness. When any person or object attracted their gaze, the eyebrows stiffened and drew nearer to each other, and a perpendicular wrinkle showed on the young man's brow. The greyish pupils turned green, and seemed flecked with black specks and yellow streaks,

flashing with a gaze so keen, that it almost seemed to wound ; and then suddenly all the previous placidity of expression returned, and the Mephistophelian-looking individual was once more an ordinary mortal, a member of the Jockey Club, perhaps, going to spend the season at Naples, and contented to set his foot on a flooring of lava that would be even firmer beneath his tread than the deck of "The Leopold." He was well and correctly dressed, without attracting notice by any appearance of showiness, wearing a dark blue frock-coat, a spotted black neckerchief knotted neither too stiffly nor too carelessly, a waistcoat of the same pattern as the scarf, a pair of light grey trousers, and shoes of fine leather. He wore a heavy gold watch-chain, and his double-eyeglass hung from a broad band of silk. In his delicately gloved hand he carried a slight cane of twisted vine-wood, terminating in a silver knob.

He advanced a few steps along the deck of the steamer, letting his eyes wander vaguely over the shore, which was by this time near at hand, and on which the travellers could now see the carriages rolling along in various directions, the busy crowds of people, and the groups of idlers, for whom the arrival of a coach or a steamboat is always a sight full of interest and novelty, though they have witnessed it a thousand times before. A flotilla of boats and skiffs freighted with hotel porters, guides, *facchini*, and all the other motley crew who look upon foreigners as their natural prey, was already gliding out from the quay to make an attack upon "The Leopold." Each boat was trying its hardest to outstrip its fellows ; and as the sailors jerked their oars energetically through the water, they exchanged, after their usual wont, such volleys of abuse and such noisy vociferations as might well have alarmed any one who was not accustomed to the ways of the lower-class Neapolitans. In order to obtain a better view of the details of the panorama that was being unfolded before him, the young man with the chestnut hair had placed his double eye-glass in position, but his attention was diverted from the sublime spectacle of the bay by the noisy uproar which arose from the flotilla, and he concentrated his

attention upon the boats. The row seemed to annoy him, his eyebrows contracted, a perpendicular wrinkle showed itself on his forehead, and his grey eyes assumed a yellowish hue.

A sudden and unexpected wave, sweeping along from the open sea, and fringed with foam, now passed beneath the steamer, which it raised and then let drop again with a thud, and rolled forwards to break against the quay in clouds of spray, drenching the promenaders, who were taken quite by surprise by this sudden shower-bath, and then, by the violence of its rebound, dashing the boats so roughly together that three or four of the *facchini* fell into the water. The accident was not a serious one, for these scamps can swim like fishes or sea-gods, and they reappeared in a second or two with their hair clinging closely to their brows and the salt water streaming from their mouths and nostrils. Standing at a respectful distance behind our strange-looking traveller, near a pile of luggage, there was a little tiger, an elderly-looking person of some fifteen years of age, a gnome in livery, strongly resembling one of those dwarfish creatures which the Chinese patiently rear in vases, to prevent them growing any bigger. His flat face, from which his nose scarcely projected, seemed to have been kept compressed ever since his infancy, and his pale eyes had that softness of expression which certain naturalists profess to have discovered in those of the toad. Although no gibbosity rounded his shoulders nor bulged his breast, still he gave one the idea of a hunchback, though one looked in vain for his hump. He was not nice to look at, but he was as perfect a specimen of his kind as his master was of his.

The voyagers now disembarked, and the porters, after an interchange of more than Homeric oaths, proceeded to divide the travellers and their luggage amongst themselves, and then led the way to the different hotels with which Naples is so abundantly provided. The traveller with the double-eyeglass and his tiger directed their steps towards the Hôtel de Rome, followed by a numerous phalanx of sturdy *facchini*, who pretended to sweat and

pant beneath the weight of a hat-box or a light bag, in the naïve hope of thereby obtaining a larger fee, while four or five of their comrades, exposing muscles as powerful as those which excite admiration in the Hercules in the Studj, propelled a hand-cart, in which a couple of trunks of very moderate size and weight were jolting. When they had arrived at the hotel, and the landlord had assigned a room to the new-comer, the porters, although they had already received three times the amount to which they were entitled, broke out into wildly demonstrative gesticulations and noisy clamour, in which supplications were mingled with threatening expressions in the most comical fashion. They all talked at once with a deafening volubility, swearing by all their gods that they had not been sufficiently recompensed for their toil and exertions. John, the tiger, who had been left to settle with them, looked like an ape surrounded by a pack of dogs. He tried to calm the noisy troop by indulging in a little bit of oratory in his native English; but his harangue met with but little success. Then, clenching his fists and raising his arms level with his breast, he put himself into the correct boxing attitude to the great amusement of the *facchini*, and with a blow from his right fist, sent the biggest of the lot rolling head over heels on the lava slabs of the pavement. This exploit put the troop to flight. The fallen colossus painfully picked himself up again, all the life knocked out of him by his fall, and, without any attempt to take vengeance on John, he went off with exaggerated contortions of pain, fully convinced that a demon dwelt beneath the jacket of this baboon, whom he had imagined he could knock down with a mere puff from his lips.

The new-comer now summoned the landlord, and asked him if a letter addressed to Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont had been received at the Hôtel de Rome. The host replied that a letter with that address had been waiting at the hotel for the past week, and he hurried off to get it. The letter, enclosed in a stout envelope of ivory-toned paper, was written in that angular hand which is adopted, a little too uniformly perhaps, by young Englishwomen of good family. Monsieur d'Aspremont opened the

letter with a haste which perhaps did not arise entirely from curiosity, and this is what he read :—

“My dear Monsieur Paul,—We arrived at Naples a couple of months ago. During the journey, which we made by short stages, my uncle complained bitterly of the heat, the mosquitoes, the wine, the butter, and the beds. He swore that he was nothing more nor less than a fool for having left his comfortable home a few miles away from London, to jolt along dusty roads dotted with detestable inns, where a decent English dog would refuse to sleep. But in spite of all his grumbling he continued to accompany me, and I could have taken him to the end of the world if I had wanted. His health has improved, and so has my own. We are quartered near the edge of the sea, in a white-washed house, buried in a sort of virgin forest of orange trees, lemon trees, myrtles, oleanders, and other exotic vegetation. We have a glorious view from the top of our terrace, and every evening you will find a cup of tea or a glass of iced lemonade, whichever you prefer, waiting in readiness for you there. My uncle, whom you have quite fascinated, I do not know how, will be delighted to shake hands with you again. Need I add that your humble servant will be none the less pleased to do the same, although you nearly cut through her fingers with your ring when bidding her adieu on the pier at Folkestone?—
ALICIA W.”

CHAPTER II.

AFTER Paul d'Aspremont had dined in his own room, he ordered a carriage, and as there are always several standing about the chief hotels in readiness for such visitors as may require them, his orders were immediately complied with. The Neapolitan cab-horses are so extremely scannny that Rossinante would have seemed over-burdened with flesh in comparison with their emaci-

ated heads. Their ribs are as plainly visible as the hoops of a barrel, and their projecting and always grazed back-bones seem to crave the knacker's knife as a welcome means of release ; for to feed one's animals is looked upon by the careless southerner as a quite superfluous formality. Then the harness is usually broken and incomplete, and is patched up and eked out with pieces of string ; and when the driver has gathered up his reins and clucked his tongue as a signal for starting, one is almost inclined to believe that the horses will disappear and the carriage vanish away in smoke, as did Cinderella's equipage when she lingered till after midnight on her way home from the ball in contravention of her fairy-godmother's orders. Nothing of the kind, however, happens. The broken-down hacks stiffen themselves on their legs, and, after a little preliminary stumbling, start off at a gallop, which they keep up till the end of their journey.

Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont's carriage flew along through the compact crowd, grazing the stalls of the sherbet-sellers with their garlands of lemons, the steaming stoves of the macaroni and fritter purveyors, and the piles of melons heaped up along the public roads like cannon-balls in parks of artillery. The lazzaroni lying all along the walls enveloped in their cloaks barely deigned to just remove their legs out of the way of the passing carriage. Our traveller turned but a very abstracted gaze on the animated and picturesque spectacle, which would certainly have absorbed the whole attention of any tourist who had not found a letter signed "Alicia W" waiting for him at his hotel. He gazed vaguely at the blue and limpid sea, where one could distinguish, bathed in a brilliant light and gleaming in the distance with tints of amethyst and sapphire, the lovely islands that are scattered in the shape of a fan at the entrance of the bay, Capri, Ischia, Nisida, and Procida, whose harmonious names sound like Greek dactyles ; but his mind was not there. It was winging its way onward in advance of his body towards Sorrento, to the little white house buried in verdure of which Alicia had written in her letter.

At this moment Monsieur d'Aspremont's face no longer wore that indefinably unpleasant expression which characterised it when some interior joy did not harmonise its inharmonious beauties. It was now truly beautiful and sympathetic, to use an Italian expression; the arches of his eyebrows were relaxed, the corners of his mouth were not twisted scornfully, and his calm eyes glowed with a soft light. Seeing him like this, it was easy to understand his having aroused the sentimental feeling which the half-tender, half-mocking phrases on the sheet of ivory-toned paper seemed to indicate. The distinguished originality of his appearance could not well be displeasing to a young girl who had been liberally brought up after the English manner by a very indulgent old uncle.

The driver kept his horses going at such a rapid pace that they soon passed Chiaja and La Marinella, and the carriage rolled along in the open country over the road which is now replaced by a railway. A black dust like powdered coal gives a plutonic appearance to the whole of this coast over which there broods a lustrous sky, and which is lapped by a sea of tender azure. It is the sweat of Vesuvius scattered by the wind that covers the coast with this powdery coating and makes the houses of Portici and Torre del Greco resemble Birmingham workshops. Monsieur d'Aspremont, however, paid no attention to the contrast of the ebon soil with the sapphire sky; he was in too great a haste to reach his journey's end. The most beautiful road seems long when a Miss Alicia is waiting for you at the end of it, a Miss Alicia to whom you said good-bye six months ago on the pier at Folkestone. Even the sky and the sea of Naples lose their magic under such circumstances.

The carriage now left the high road and, turning down a lane, presently drew up in front of a gate enclosed between two columns of whitened bricks, surmounted by arms of terra cotta in which aloes were spreading out their broad leaves like sheets of tin-plate with points of dagger-like sharpness. The gate between the pillars was of open bars, painted green. Instead of a wall there was a cactus hedge whose stems bulged out in de-

formed knobs, while the spiky fronds of the plants were interlaced in inextricable confusion. Towering over the hedge there were three or four enormous fig-trees, surrounded by compact masses of large lustrous green leaves, and flourishing with a quite African vigour. A tall parasol-pine spread out its umbrella of foliage, and it was with difficulty that the eye could discover through the interstices of all this luxuriant verdure a few patches of the gleaming white walls of the house which lay hid behind the curtain of thick greenery. A tawny woman-servant with frizzy hair so thick that the teeth of a comb would have broken against it, ran up on hearing the sound of the carriage-wheels, and opened the gate. Then, stepping in front of Monsieur d'Aspremont along an avenue of oleanders whose branches brushed his cheeks with their blossom, she led him on to the terrace where Miss Alicia was taking tea with her uncle.

By a caprice which was not unnatural in a young girl who was sated with the comforts and elegancies of life, and perhaps also from a perverse opposition to her uncle, Miss Alicia had chosen this villa, the owners of which were travelling abroad, and which had remained unoccupied for several years, in preference to a more civilized habitation. In its neglected garden, which had, indeed, almost returned to a state of nature, she found a wild charm which delighted her. In the quickening climate of Naples, everything had shot up with prodigious vigour. Orange trees, pomegranates, and lemon trees had spread out luxuriantly, and their branches, no longer having to fear the pruner's knife, had formed an interlacing mass from one end of the avenue to the other. When the commodore—as Alicia familiarly called her uncle—beheld this impenetrable jungle through which it was only possible to make one's way blade in hand, he broke out into loud cries, and asserted that his niece was certainly mad. Alicia, however, gravely promised to have a passage cut from the gate to the dining-room, and another from the dining-room to the terrace, wide enough for the carriage of a cask of malmsey, the only concession which she could be prevailed upon to make to avuncular protestations. Her uncle speedily resigned himself

for he never could resist his niece, and he was now sitting by her side on the terrace sipping away at a great cup of rum, under the pretence of drinking tea.

When Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont appeared at the top of the steps, Alicia got up from her seat, and, uttering a little cry of pleasure, advanced a few steps to meet him. Paul took her hand after the English fashion, but the young girl raised her captive fingers to the level of her friend's lips with a manner full of childlike prettiness and innocent coquetry. The commodore made an attempt to get up on to his somewhat gouty legs, and succeeded in doing so after a few grimaces caused by the pain it caused him, which contrasted comically with the air of jubilation with which his broad face was beaming. He approached, with what for him was a vigorous step, the charming group formed by the two young people, and grasped Paul's hand in such a vigorous way as to almost crush his fingers, which is the supremest manifestation of British cordiality.

Miss Alicia Ward was one of those English brunettes who realise an ideal whose conditions seem incompatible, that is to say, she had a skin of such dazzling whiteness as to make milk, or snow, or lilies, or alabaster, or virgin wax, or whatever else poets have used to express the perfection of whiteness, seem yellowish; while her lips were like the ruddiest cherries, and her hair was as black as a crow's wing. The effect of the contrast is irresistible, and produces a beauty entirely of its own, the equal of which cannot be found anywhere else. It is possible, perhaps, that there are Circassian girls who have been brought up from infancy in the seraglio who possess this marvellous complexion, but we must beware of trusting the exaggerations of oriental poetry on these matters, and Lewis's sketches of the harems of Cairo. Alicia was certainly the most perfect type of this kind of beauty. The elongated oval of her head, her complexion of incomparable purity, her delicately chiselled transparent nose, her deep blue eyes fringed with long lashes which trembled over her roseate cheeks like black butterflies when she drooped her eyelids, her lips of brilliant

coral, her hair falling in lustrous wreaths like bands of satin on each side of her cheeks and swan-like neck, testified to the truthfulness of those ideal feminine faces depicted by English artists, and which seem such charming impostures. Alicia was wearing a flounced dress of grenadine, festooned and embroidered with red palms, which harmonized admirably with the strings of small pieces of coral which she wore in her hair, and with her necklace and bracelets. Five pendant rays hanging from a faceted bead of coral drooped quiveringly from the lobe of each of her small and delicately convoluted ears.

After this portrait of Miss Alicia Ward, we must now, if only by way of contrast, proceed to a description of the commodore, even it be only a caricature after the manner of Hogarth. The commodore, who was now some sixty years of age, presented the peculiarity of a face that was of an uniformly fiery red, marked by white eyebrows and mutton-chop whiskers of the same colour, which gave him the appearance of an old copper-skin tattooed with chalk. Exposure to the hot sun, unavoidable in a journey in Italy, had added additional coats to his fiery colouring, and the commodore's appearance irresistibly suggested a huge sugar-almond surrounded by cotton wool. He was dressed from head to foot in a uniform suit, his jacket, waistcoat, trousers, and gaiters being all made of the same downy material of a greyish grape colour, which, the tailor had affirmed upon his word of honour, was the most fashionable and becoming tint, in saying which he was probably speaking the truth. But notwithstanding his odd-looking clothes, there was nothing vulgar or commonplace about the commodore's appearance. His extreme neatness and cleanliness, his irreproachable bearing and his refined manners, testified to the perfect gentleman. His two chief characteristics were, adoration of his niece and a capacity for consuming large quantities of Madeira and Jamaica rum.

"See how well and bright I am looking! Look at my colour, though I haven't got as much as my uncle yet, and it's to be hoped, indeed, that I never shall have! But I have got

plenty of genuine roses for all that," said Alicia, as she stroked her cheek with her taper finger that terminated in a nail which was as polished as agate. "I've grown so plump too, and my shoulders are no longer those poor scranny creatures which used to make me feel so ashamed of myself when I went to a ball. Tell me, now, do you think it's very coquettish of me to have hidden myself away from my *fiancé* for three months, so that when he returned to me again he might find me blooming and vigorous?"

As she delivered this little speech in the merrily animated manner which was habitual to her, she stood confronting Paul, as though to challenge and defy examination.

"Isn't she, indeed, looking quite as strong and robust now," added the commodore, "as the girls of Procida who carry those Greek jars about on their heads?"

"Though Miss Alicia has certainly not become more beautiful, commodore," replied Paul, "for that was impossible, she is evidently in much better health than when, through coquetry, as she pretends, she imposed such a painful separation upon me."

His gaze now rested with a strange fixity upon the young girl standing in front of him. Suddenly the lovely rose tints which she had just boasted of having acquired faded away from Alicia's cheeks as the crimson glow of evening fades out of the snowy slopes of a mountain when the sun sinks beneath the horizon, and she tremblingly laid her hand on her heart, while her sweet lips paled and contracted. Paul sprang up in alarm, as also did the commodore; but Alicia's bright glow of colour now revived, and she smiled, though she had to make some little effort to do so.

"I promised you a cup of tea or some sherbet," she said; "and, though I'm English, I should advise you to choose the sherbet. Ice is better than hot water in this country so near to Africa, which sends its sirocco direct to us."

They all three seated themselves round the stone-table beneath the roof of vine-leaves. The sun was sinking into the sea, and

the bluish day, which the Neapolitans call night, was succeeding the golden one. The moon, shining through the lace-work of the foliage, was flecking the terrace with patches of silver ; the sea was gently brushing the beach as though it were kissing it, and far away in the distance could be heard the sound of tambourines accompanying the tarentella.

It was now time for Paul to take his departure, and Vicè, the tawny domestic with the frizzy hair, came with a lantern to lead him through the maze of the garden. When she had brought the sherbet and iced water she had gazed at the new-comer with a mingled expression of curiosity and fear. The result of her examination did not appear to have been favourable to Paul, for her face, which was always as brown as a cigar, seemed now even still darker, and as she accompanied him through the garden she held out towards him, in such a way that he could not notice it, the little finger and the forefinger of her hand, while the other two fingers, bent beneath her palm, joined with her thumb to form some cabalistic sign.

CHAPTER III.

ALICIA'S friend returned to the Hôtel de Rome by the same way as he had come. The evening was one of incomparable beauty. A pure and brilliant moon was pouring out over the diaphanous azure of the sea a flood of quivering silver, the perpetual rippling of which by the gently swelling waters made it glow still more lustrously. Out in the open bay the fishing smacks, carrying iron lanterns filled with blazing oakum fixed to their prows, dotted the sea with ruddy stars, whose reflections furrowed the waters with lines of scarlet glow. The smoke from Vesuvius, which was white during the day, was now transformed into a luminous column that likewise cast a lurid reflection athwart the bay. Some belated beggars were still wandering about the shore, affected, though they knew it not, by the magic

beauty of the spectacle, and plunging their great black eyes into the boundless blue of the distance. Others, seated on the edge of a stranded boat, were singing the air from "Lucia" or the popular song, at that time on everyone's lips, *Ti voglio ben' assai*, in voices that tenors who get a hundred thousand francs for an engagement might well have envied. Naples, like all southern towns, is late in going to bed, but the lights in the windows were now being gradually extinguished, and only the lottery offices with their festoons of coloured paper, their favourite numbers, and their bright glitter were still open, ready to receive the money of any who, as they returned home, felt suddenly disposed to stake a few carlins or ducats on a number they fancied.

Paul got into bed, and, drawing the gauze mosquito curtains closely round him, soon fell asleep. According to the usual experience of travellers after a sea-voyage, his bed, though firm and motionless enough, seemed to him to be pitching and rolling as though the Hôtel de Rome were "The Leopold." This made him dream that he was still at sea, and that he saw Alicia, looking very pale, standing on the quay with her red-faced uncle, and making signs to him with her hand not to disembark. The young girl's face bore an expression of the profoundest grief, and, in repelling him, she seemed to be yielding against her will to the commands of some imperious necessity. This dream, to which recent events imparted a semblance of strong reality, so distressed the sleeping man that he awoke, and was glad to find himself in his bedroom where the trembling flame of a night-light was illuminating with an opal glow a little porcelain tower, round which a crowd of mosquitoes were buzzing. To avoid again falling under the influence of his painful dream, Paul struggled against his drowsiness, and began to think of the commencement of his acquaintance with Alicia, dwelling upon all the charming, even if sometimes puerile, scenes of a first love.

In imagination he again saw the red brick house at Richmond wreathed with honeysuckle and wild roses, where Alicia lived

with her uncle, and which had been hospitably opened to him on his first visit to England, in response to one of those letters of introduction, the results of which are generally comprised in an invitation to dinner. He recollected the dress of white Indian muslin, ornamented by a single ribbon, which Alicia, who had only left school on the previous day, was wearing, and the spray of jasmine which hung in her flowing hair like a flower in the wreath of Ophelia as the current swept her onwards, her velvety blue eyes, her mouth, slightly opened and discovering her little pearly teeth, her slim neck, erect like that of a swan on the watch, and the sudden blushes which sprang to her cheeks whenever the young Frenchman's glance met her own. He could distinctly recall the room with its dark wainscotting, its green curtains, and the brightly coloured sketches of hunting and racing scenes. The piano displayed a line of keys that resembled the teeth of some ancient dowager. The mantelpiece was patterned with ivy sprays, and the well black-leaded grate gleamed brightly. The oak chairs with their turned legs stretched their morocco covered arms, and the carpet spread out its roses over the floor, as Alicia, quivering like a leaf, began to sing most adorably out of tune, the song from "Anna Bolena," *Deh, non voler constringere*, accompanied in bad time by Paul himself, who was suffering from an emotion equal to that of the girl's, while the commodore, drowsy from the laborious digestion of a heavy meal, and even redder than usual, let his voluminous "Times" and supplement slip on to the floor.

Then the scene changed. Paul had become more intimate with them, and had been invited by the commodore to stay for a few days at his country house in Lincolnshire. It was an old feudal castle with crenelated towers and Gothic windows, and was half-buried from sight beneath a thick growth of ivy, but all the internal arrangements were replete with every modern comfort. The house stood at the end of a carefully rolled and watered lawn of velvety turf. A gravelled road bordered the lawn, and served as a riding ground for Alicia mounted on her shaggy-maned Shetland pony, such an one as Sir Edwin Land-

seer loved to paint, and to which he imparted an almost human expression. Paul accompanied Miss Ward on her circular rides, on a bay horse which the commodore had placed at his disposal, for the surgeon, finding symptoms of weakness in his chest, had ordered him to take exercise.

Then Paul saw in his mind's eye a light boat gliding over the lake, pushing aside the water-lilies and sending the king-fishers fluttering beneath the silver foliage of the willows. Alicia was rowing, and Paul held the rudder-strings. How lovely she looked as she sat in front of him! her straw hat glittering in the sunshine, forming, as it were, a nimbus of glory round her head. As she leant back to pull her oar through the water, the sheeny tips of her little grey boots rested against the edge of the seat. Miss Ward had not an Andalusian foot, short and round as a flat-iron, such as is admired in Spain, but she had slim ankles and a delicately arched instep, and the sole of her boot, though it was perhaps rather long, was not a couple of inches in width. The commodore remained on land, fearing lest his heavy bulk might prove too much for the frail boat. He met his niece when she landed again and, with a display of quite maternal care, threw a cloak over her shoulders lest she should take a chill. Then the boat was fastened to a stake, and the party went off to the house to lunch. It was a pleasure to see Alicia, who usually ate no more than a bird, now munching vigorously away with her pearly teeth at a rosy slice of Yorkshire ham, as thin as a sheet of paper, and nibbling at a roll of bread till there was not a crumb left for the gold fish in the basin of the fountain.

Happy days glide by so quickly! Week after week Paul postponed his departure, and the lovely greenery of the park began to assume golden tints, and a white mist commenced to rise from the lake in the mornings. In spite of all the gardener's ceaseless raking, the dead leaves littered over the gravel of the drive, millions of little frozen dewdrops glistened on the green lawn, and in the evenings the magpies jumped about the branches of the leafless trees noisily quarrelling among themselves. Alicia

began to grow pale beneath Paul's unquiet gaze, and the only colour she now had left was a couple of little rosy patches on the top of her cheek bones. She often felt very cold, and the blazing coal-fire seemed to have lost its power to warm her. The doctor appeared anxious, and his last prescription for Miss Ward had been that she was to spend the winter at Pisa and the spring at Naples.

Family affairs had recalled Paul to France. Alicia and the commodore were starting for Italy, and the separation took place at Folkestone. Not a word had been said between them, but Miss Ward looked upon Paul and herself as being engaged, and the commodore had squeezed the young man's hand in a significant fashion, crushing his fingers as only a son-in-law's could be crushed. Paul, after six months of weary waiting, which seemed to him in his impatience as long as six centuries, had now the happiness of finding Alicia quite recovered from her state of languor and radiant with health. All the former traces of childishness had vanished from the young girl's bearing, and Paul delightedly reflected that the commodore could have no objection to offer whenever he asked him for his niece's hand. Lulled by these pleasing thoughts he now dropped asleep, and did not awake again till morning.

Our traveller wrapped his dressing-gown round him, and leant over the balcony. The sky was perfectly clear; there was merely a slight white cloud drifting onwards to the town before a gentle breeze. Paul gazed at it with that peculiar expression we have previously spoken of; and his eyebrows contracted in a frown. Presently other vaporous wreaths appeared and amalgamated with the single white fleecy strip, and soon a thick curtain of clouds spread its dark folds over the castle of Saint Elmo. Heavy drops of rain began to patter on the lava pavement, and in a few minutes there was pouring down one of those rushing deluges which turn the streets of Naples into so many torrents, sweeping dogs and even asses along in their violent currents. The crowd of people below, taken by surprise, hurried away in search of shelter. The proprietors of the open-air stalls

immediately folded their tents and changed their quarters, but not without losing a certain amount of their commodities ; and the rain, mistress of the situation, swept the deserted quay of Santa Lucia with its pelting gusts. The colossal *facchino* to whom John had administered such an effective blow with his fist was leaning against a wall beneath a balcony, the projecting ledge of which afforded him some little protection. He had not fled off in the general rush, and was now gazing up meditatively at the window from which Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont was leaning. He gave utterance to his thoughts in these words, which he growled out with an air of irritation :

“The captain of ‘The Leopold,’ would have done well to chuck that *forestiere* into the sea.” Then, passing his hand through the opening of his thick canvas shirt, he touched the bundle of amulets which was suspended from his neck by a ribbon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE down-pour did not last long ; in a few minutes a glowing sun dried up the last drops of the rain, and the crowd again began swarming joyously over the quay. The porter Timberio, however, still appeared to retain the impression he had formed of the young Frenchman, for he transported himself and his belongings out of sight of the windows of the hotel ; thereby causing certain lazzaroni of his acquaintance to express their surprise that he should give up such a favourable situation and take himself to a less advantageous one.

“Any one may have it who wants it,” he replied, shaking his head with a mysterious air. “I know what I know.”

Paul breakfasted in his own room, for either from shyness or disdain of his fellows he did not care to frequent the public rooms. Then he dressed himself, and set out to visit the Studj museum as a means of passing the time till he might with propriety renew his visit to Alicia. But a lover is not a very en-

thusiastic admirer of the monuments of art ; for him the slightest outline of his adored one's features is worth all the Greek and Roman marbles in the world. Having at last managed to get rid of some two or three hours in the museum, Paul now sprang into his carriage and drove away towards the country house where Miss Ward was living. The driver, with that intuitive recognition of the passions which characterises southern natures, whipped his broken-down hacks along at a furious pace, and the carriage soon drew up in front of the pillars surmounted by vases of foliage which we have already described. The same servant came to open the gate. Her locks were still tangled in knotted curls, and the whole of her costume, as on the previous occasion, consisted merely of a blouse of coarse canvas embroidered on the sleeves and at the neck with coloured thread, and a thick stiff shirt, spotted transversely, such as is worn by the women of Procida. Her legs, we must confess, were innocent of stockings, and as her bare feet stepped along over the dust they would certainly have won the admiration of a sculptor. A bundle of little charms of singular shapes, made of coral and horn, hung suspended over her breast from a black ribbon ; and upon them, to Vicé's visible satisfaction, Paul's eye now rested.

Miss Alicia was on the terrace, the spot which she most affected. The young girl, enveloped in a wrapper of cream-coloured China silk, the plaited trimmings of which she was pitilessly crumpling, was idly swinging in an Indian hammock of red and white cord, decked with feathers, which was slung between two of the pillars that supported the roofing of wild vines. Her feet, the tips of which could be seen through the meshes of the hammock, were encased in slippers made of aloe fibres, and her lovely bare arms were crossed over her head in the attitude of the antique Cleopatra ; for, although it was only the beginning of May, the heat was already excessive, and thousands of grasshoppers were buzzing in chorus beneath the surrounding bushes. The commodore, wearing his planter's costume, was sitting in a cane chair, and every now and then kept pulling at the rope which set the hammock

swinging. The group was completed by a third person, the Count d'Altavilla, a young Neapolitan fashionable, whose presence there called up on Paul's brow that frowning look which gave to his physiognomy an expression of diabolical maliciousness.

The count was, indeed, one of those men whom a lover would scarcely care to see near his mistress. His tall figure was perfectly proportioned ; his hair was black as jet, and lay in thickly tufted masses over his smooth and well-moulded brow. Sparks of the Neapolitan sun seemed to glitter in his eyes, and his teeth, which were large and strong, but purely white as pearls, gained an additional brightness from the vivid crimson of his lips, and the olive tint of his complexion. The only criticism which the most scrupulous taste could have formulated against the count was, that he was too handsome. Altavilla had his clothes sent from London, and the most severely critical dandy could have found no fault with them. There was nothing Italian about his toilet except his shirt studs, which were too costly. In them the natural taste of the child of the South for jewels was betrayed. Perhaps, too, anywhere except in Naples, the good taste of the bunch of bifurcated branches of coral, of the hands of Vesuvian lava, with their fingers bent or clutching hold of a poignard ; of the dogs, with legs outstretched in a running attitude, of the white and black horns, and of the other similar trifles, all suspended by a single ring to his watch-chain, might have been questioned ; but a morning stroll along the Toledo, or to the Villa Reale, would have been sufficient to prove to demonstration that the count was guilty of no eccentricity in wearing this collection of odd-looking charms dangling over his waistcoat.

When Paul d'Aspremont presented himself, the count, at Miss Ward's pressing request, was singing one of those sweet popular Neapolitan melodies of unknown authorship, one alone of which would be sufficient to make the fortune of an opera. Those who have never heard them sung on the coast of Chiaja, or on the quay by a lazzarone, or a fisherman, or a

trovatelle, may gain some idea of them from the charming songs of Gordigiani. They are compounded of the sigh of the zephyr, a ray of moonlight, the perfume of orange-blossom, and the beating of a heart. Alicia was humming the air, which she wanted to impress upon her memory, in her sweet but slightly flat English voice after the count, and without interrupting herself she gave a friendly little nod of welcome to Paul, who, put out by the sight of the handsome young Neapolitan, looked at her with a not very amiable expression. One of the cords sustaining the hammock now broke, and Miss Ward slipped to the ground, but without hurting herself. Six hands were simultaneously held out to assist her. The young girl, however, was on her feet again in a moment, blushing with confusion at having fallen down in the presence of the young men, though not a fold of her dress had been disarranged.

"I tested those cords with my own weight," the commodore said, "and Alicia is as light as a humming bird."

The Count d'Altavilla shook his head mysteriously. It was evident that in his own mind he had assigned the snapping of the cord to some very different cause than Alicia's weight; but, like the well-mannered man he was, he maintained silence on the subject, and contented himself by twirling the bunch of charms on his waistcoat.

Just as all men become morose and constrained when they find themselves in the presence of a rival they fear, instead of redoubling, as they should, their amiability and grace, so Paul d'Aspremont, though he had often moved in society, could not conceal his dissatisfaction. He replied only in monosyllables, allowed the conversation to flag, and, as he glanced at Altavilla, his gaze assumed its sinister expression; the yellow streaks in his eyes seemed to writhe beneath the transparent grey of his pupils like eels at the bottom of a well. Every time that Paul looked at him in this way, the count, with a seemingly mechanical gesture, pulled off a flower from a vase that was standing in front of him, and threw it down so as to intersect the course of the angry glance.

"What are you pulling my poor plant to pieces in that way for?" cried Miss Ward, who had noticed what Altavilla was doing. "What have the poor flowers done that you should pull off their heads like that?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I really didn't know what I was doing," replied Altavilla, snapping off a magnificent rose which he tossed away after the others.

"You really fidget me dreadfully," Alicia now said, "and, quite unconsciously, are shocking one of my prejudices. I have never plucked a flower. A bouquet fills me with a sort of horror; it is made up of dead flowers, of the corpses of roses and verbenas and carnations, whose scent savours to me of the sepulchre."

"In atonement for the murders I have just committed," replied Altavilla, bowing, "I will send you a hundred living flowers."

Paul had risen from his seat and was fingering the rim of his hat as though he were contemplating an immediate departure.

"What! are you going away already?" asked Miss Ward.

"I have some letters to write, important letters."

"Oh, how rude of you to say that!" retorted the young girl, pulling a pretty face. "How can you have any important letters when it isn't to me that you are going to write?"

"Don't go yet, Paul," said the commodore, "I have got a plan in my head for this evening, which is safe of my niece's approbation. We will first of all go and drink a glass of the water from the spring at Santa Lucia; it smells of rotten eggs, but it gives one an appetite. Then we'll go and eat a dozen or two oysters at the fish-market, and then dine under a vine-arbour at some genuine Neapolitan *osteria*, drinking Falernian and Lacryma Christi, and after that we'll wind up the entertainment with a visit to Signor Pulcinella. The count will explain the intricacies of the dialect to us."

This programme, however, seemed to have no charms for Monsieur d'Aspremont, who bowed coldly and took his departure. Altavilla remained for a few moments longer, and then as Miss Ward, vexed at Paul's departure, seemed disinclined to

Join in the commodore's scheme, he too took his leave. Two hours later Alicia received an immense quantity of potted flowering plants of very rare species; and also, to her great surprise, an enormous pair of Sicilian bull's horns, transparent as jasper and as polished as agate, measuring a good three feet in length, and terminating in threatening black points. A magnificent bronze mount enabled the horns to be placed with their points upwards on a mantelpiece, table, or bracket. Vicè, who had helped the porters to unload the flowers and the horns, seemed to understand the meaning of this odd gift. She placed the magnificent horns, which might have been taken from the brow of the divine bull that carried off Europa, in a conspicuous position on the table.

"There," she said, as she did so, "we are well defended now!"

"What do you mean, Vicè?" asked Miss Ward.

"Oh, nothing, miss, except—except that the French signor has got very singular eyes."

CHAPTER V.

THE dinner-hour was long since past, and the coal-fires which during the daytime transform the kitchen of the Hôtel de Rome into the semblance of the crater of Vesuvius were slowly smouldering down under the sheet-iron dampers; the sauce-pans had been restored to their respective places on the walls, and were now gleaming in a row like the bucklers on the edge of an ancient trireme; a lamp of yellow brass, resembling those that have been recovered from the ruins of Pompeii, was suspended by a triple chain from the central beam of the ceiling, lighting up, with its three wicks carelessly plunged in oil, the middle of the huge kitchen, the corners of which lay buried in shadow. The luminous rays falling down from above produced picturesque

effects of light and shade among a group of characteristic figures seated round the heavy wooden table, hacked and furrowed with knife cuts, which stood in the centre of this vast apartment whose walls the smoke of the culinary processes had glazed with that bituminous coating so dear to artists of the School of Caravaggis. Spagnoletto or Salvator Rosa, in their robust love of truthfulness, would certainly not have disdained as models those whom chance, or, to be strictly correct, habitual evening custom, had brought together there.

There was the *chef*, Virgilio Falsacappa, a very important personage of colossal stature and formidable rotundity, who might very well have passed for one of the guests of Vitellius if he had worn a Roman toga bordered with purple instead of a jacket of white dimity. His excessively accentuated features seemed like a sort of grave caricature of the countenances to be seen on certain ancient medals. Bushy black eyebrows that projected half an inch from his face crowned eyes resembling those of theatrical masks. An enormous nose cast a shadow over a huge mouth that seem furnished with three rows of teeth like the maw of a shark. A dewlap as fully developed as that of the Farnese Bull connected his chin, wherein was a dimple in which one could have buried one's fist, with a broad and powerful neck, lined all over with veins and muscles. Two tufts of whiskers, each of which would have furnished a handsome beard for a sapper, fringed his huge face, coloured with fiery hues. Gleaming black frizzy hair, with which were mingled a few threads of silver, twisted itself over his head in short little curls. The nape of his neck, puffing out in three swelling transverse rings, seemed to be bursting from the collar of his jacket. In the lobes of his ears, which were pushed up when he worked his jaws, that seemed capable of grinding a whole ox in a day, hung silver rings as large as the disc of the moon. Such was Master Virgilio Falsacappa, who now, with his apron rolled up over his hips, and his knife sheathed in a wooden case, resembled a sacrificing priest rather than a cook.

Next to the cook was Timberio the porter, whom the gymnas-

tic nature of his profession and the meagreness of his diet, consisting of a handful of half-cooked macaroni and a slice of water-melon, washed down by a glass of snow-water, kept in a condition of comparative scranniness; though, if he had been plentifully fed, he would in all probability have developed as massive a form as Falsacappa's, for his robust framework seemed made to support an enormous weight of flesh. His dress consisted of a pair of flimsy trousers, a long brown stuff waistcoat, and a coarse cloak thrown over his shoulders.

Leaning his elbows on the edge of the table sat Scazziga, the driver of the hackney-carriage hired by Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont. He, too, was an individual of striking physiognomy. His irregular and intelligent features wore an expression of naïve astuteness; an imperious smile played over his disdainful lips, and it was evident from the amenity of his manners that he lived in constant relationship with people of aristocratic tone. His clothes, bought at a second-hand dealer's, resembled a sort of livery of which he was in no small degree proud, and which, in his own estimation, created an immense social gap between himself and the vagabondish Timberio. His conversation was interlarded with English and French words, which did not always happily express the meaning he intended to convey by them, but did not the less on that account excite the admiration of the kitchen-maids and scullions who listened in wonder to the display of so much learning.

A little in the background were two young servant girls, whose features recalled, though certainly with less nobility of expression, the well-known type to be observed on Syracusan coins—the brow low, the nose forming an unbroken line with it, the lips somewhat thick, and the chin solid and vigorous. Bands of bluish black hair met together at the back of their heads, where they were rolled into a heavy coil in which were stuck some pins headed with knobs of coral. Threefold necklaces of the same material circled their caryatid-like necks, the muscles of which had been developed by their habit of carrying burdens upon their heads. Dandies would certainly have looked with disdain

upon these poor girls who preserved unalloyed the blood of the beautiful races of ancient Greece, but every artist would have taken out his sketch-book at sight of them, and sharpened his pencil. Have you seen, reader, Murillo's picture of the cooking cherubs? If you have, there will be no need for us to describe here the curly frizzy-haired heads of the three or four scullions who completed the group.

The assembled council were debating a grave question. Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont, the Frenchman who had arrived by the last steamer, was the subject of discussion, and the kitchen had met together to pass judgment upon him. Timberio the porter was speaking; and he kept pausing between his sentences like a popular actor, so as to allow his audience time to fully grasp his meaning and give their assent to it, or raise objections.

"Now follow my argument carefully," said the orator. "'The Leopold' is a well-found Tuscan boat against which there isn't a word to be said, except, perhaps, that it brings over too many English heretics."

"The English heretics pay well," interrupted Scazziga, whom the remembrance of handsome gratuities made tolerant.

"Doubtless; the least a heretic can do when he makes a Christian work for him is to recompense him generously, so as to diminish his humiliation as far as possible."

"I don't feel at all humiliated in driving a *forestiere* in my carriage. I don't make myself into a beast of burden like you do, Timberio."

"Haven't I been baptized as well as you?" retorted the porter, contracting his brow and clenching his fists.

"Let Timberio go on with what he's got to say!" cried the group in chorus, alarmed at the prospect of this interesting discussion turning into a personal quarrel.

"You will grant, too," continued the orator, calming down, "that the weather was lovely when 'The Leopold' came into port?"

"Oh, yes, we'll grant you that, Timberio," replied the *chef* with majestic condescension.

"The sea was as smooth as glass," continued the *facchino*, "and yet an enormous wave dashed so violently against Gennaro's boat, that he was knocked into the water along with two or three of his mates. Does this strike you as altogether natural? Gennaro is quite at home on the sea, and he could dance the tarentella on a spar without falling."

"Perhaps he had had a glass too much of Asprino," objected Scazziga, the sceptic of the party.

"He hadn't even had a glass of lemonade," continued Timberio; "but there was a gentleman standing at the side of the steamer who looked at him in a peculiar way. You know what I mean!"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" replied the chorus, stretching out their fore and little fingers in perfect unison.

"And this gentleman," resumed Timberio, "was none other than Signor Paul d'Aspremont."

"The gentleman who has number 3," inquired the cook, "and to whom I send up his dinner separately?"

"Yes, that's the one," replied the younger and prettier of the two servant-maids; "and a more bad-tempered, disagreeable, stuck-up traveller I never yet cast eyes upon. He's never given me a look or a word, though all the gentlemen say I'm worth a compliment."

"You are worth much more than that, my pretty Gelsomina," said Timberio gallantly; "but it is a very fortunate thing for you that this foreigner hasn't taken any notice of you."

"You are really too superstitious," interposed the sceptical Scazziga, whose intercourse with foreigners had imbued him with a somewhat Voltairean spirit.

"If you go on associating with heretics much longer," retorted Timberio, "you'll end by not believing in the blessed Saint Januarius himself!"

"Gennaro's tumbling into the sea," continued Scazziga, taking up the cudgels on behalf of his patron, "is no proof that Signor Paul d'Aspremont possesses the influence you attribute to him."

"If you want other proofs, I can give them to you. This morning I saw him standing at his window with his eyes fixed upon a cloud that was no bigger than a feather that has fallen out from a slit in the seam of a pillow ; and immediately black rain-clouds began to swarm up, and such a deluge poured down that the dogs could quench their thirst as they stood."

Scazziga was, however, not yet convinced, and he shook his head with a doubting air.

"The servant, too, is no better than his master," continued Timberio ; "and the little ape in boots must have an understanding with the devil, to have knocked me down like he did, me who could kill him with a fillip of my finger !"

"I am of Timberio's opinion," said the *chef* majestically. "The foreigner eats very little ; he has sent away the stuffed larks, the fricaseed chicken, and the macaroni and tomatoes that I had cooked for him with my own hands ! There is some mystery or other hidden beneath such asceticism as this. Why should a rich man deny himself savoury delicacies, and merely take a little plain soup and a slice of cold meat ?"

"He has red hair," said Gelsomina, passing her fingers through the black forest of her locks.

"And his eyes are rather prominent," added Pepina, the other servant maid.

"And too near his nose," continued Timberio.

"And the wrinkle that comes on his forehead is as big as a horse-shoe," said the burly Virgilio Falsacappa, concluding the indictment. "He is certainly then, a——"

"Don't say the word, it is quite unnecessary !" cried all the company in chorus, except Scazziga, who still remained incredulous. "We shall be on our guard."

"I'm afraid I should get into trouble with the police," Timberio now said, "if I were to accidentally let a heavy trunk fall upon the head of this uncanny *forestiere* !"

"It is very rash of Scazziga to drive him," remarked Gelsomina.

"I'm on my box, and he can only see my back, and his eyes

couldn't possibly meet mine at the necessary angle. Besides, I don't believe in such nonsense."

"You have no religion, Scazziga," said the colossal Palforio, the under-cook, a man of Herculean build.

While he was being discussed in this way in the kitchen of the Hôtel de Rome, Paul, whom the sight of the Count d'Altavilla at Miss Ward's had put into a bad humour, had gone for a walk to the Villa Reale, and more than once the wrinkle furrowed his brow, and his eyes assumed their set gaze. He fancied he caught sight of Alicia passing by in a closed carriage, accompanied by the count and her uncle, and he dashed up to it, sticking his double eye-glass across his nose, to make sure whether his eyes had deceived him or not ; but the horse, taking alarm at Paul's sudden spring forward, galloped hastily away. Paul now ate an ice at the Café de l'Europe in the palace ; and several people scrutinized him attentively, and then changed their position with a singular gesture. He then entered the Pulcinella theatre where a burlesque was being performed. The actor began to grow confused in the midst of his comic improvisations, and stopped short. He recovered himself again, however, but presently, in the middle of a piece of buffoonery, his black cardboard nose slipped down, and he could not succeed in putting it back into its place. Then, as though he were offering an excuse for himself, he made a hasty gesticulation in explanation of his mishap, for Paul's eyes, fixed upon him, quite deprived him of all his powers. The spectators in Paul's immediate neighbourhood now took themselves off one after another ; and Monsieur d'Aspremont rose from his seat to leave the theatre, quite unconscious of the effect he was producing. In the lobby he heard people pronouncing in low tones a word which was quite strange and unintelligible to him.

"*A jettatore ! a jettatore !*" they were exclaiming.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day after the gift of the horns the Count d'Altavilla paid another visit to Miss Ward. The young English girl was drinking tea with her uncle exactly as though she were in some red-brick house at Ramsgate, and not at Naples on the terrace of the white-washed country villa, surrounded by fig-trees and cactuses and aloes; for one of the characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon race is adherence to regular customs however they may be at variance with the climate. The commodore was in radiant spirits. By means of lumps of ice produced artificially, for nothing but snow was to be obtained on the mountains that towered aloft behind Castellamare, he had at last succeeded in preserving his butter in a state of solidity; and he was now engaged with visible satisfaction in spreading a piece of it on a slice of bread. After the few common-places which precede every conversation, like the preludes with which pianists test the key-board before commencing to play in earnest, Alicia abruptly questioned the young Neapolitan count.

"What made you send me that very odd present of the horns along with the flowers?" she asked. "My servant Vicè said that they were a protection against the *fascino*, but I couldn't get anything further out of her."

"Vicè is right," replied the count, bowing.

"But what is the *fascino*?" continued the young girl; "I don't understand your superstitions, for I suppose this *fascino* has got something to do with some sort of popular superstition or other."

"The *fascino* is the baleful influence exercised by a person endowed, or, I should say, afflicted, with the evil-eye."

"I hope I shall not give you a very unfavourable idea of my intelligence if I confess that I am still in the dark," said Alicia, "but you are really explaining one difficulty by another. 'Evil-eye' is a very unintelligible translation to me of *fascino*. Though

I understand Latin, as the person in the play says, talk to me as though I didn't."

"I will explain the matter to you as clearly as possible," replied Altavilla; "but you must not, in your British contempt, put me down as a savage, and wonder to yourself if my clothes do not hide a body tatooed with red and blue figures. I am a child of civilisation; I was educated in Paris; I can speak English and French; I have read Voltaire; I believe in steam-engines and railways; I eat macaroni with a fork; and I wear Suède gloves in the morning, coloured ones in the afternoon, and straw-tinted ones in the evening."

The attention of the commodore, who was buttering his second slice of bread, was arrested by this strange commencement, and he desisted from the operation upon which he was engaged and fixed upon Altavilla his blue eyes, whose colour contrasted very oddly with his brick-red complexion.

"These are all strong titles to my respect," said Alicia with a smile, "and after this I should indeed have to be very exacting if I suspected you of barbarism. But is what you are going to tell me so very terrible, or so very absurd, that you use so much circumlocution in arriving at it?"

"Yes, indeed, it is both very terrible and very absurd, and even quite nonsensical," replied the count. "If I were in London or Paris, I should probably be inclined to laugh at it with you, but here in Naples——"

"You will maintain your gravity? Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely."

"Well, now let us get to the *fascino*," said Miss Ward, who was impressed, in spite of herself, by Altavilla's seriousness.

"It is a belief which goes back to the remotest antiquity. Allusion is made to it in the Bible. Virgil speaks of it in a tone of conviction. Bronze amulets discovered in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae, and the talismanic signs drawn on the walls of the disinterred houses, clearly prove how general this superstition formerly was." Altavilla accentuated the word "superstition" in a mischievous tone. "The entire East still

firmly believes in it. Red or green hands are affixed on the walls of the Moorish houses to avert the evil influence. A hand is sculptured on the keystone of the Gate of Judgment at the Alhambra, a fact which proves that this superstition is at least very ancient, even though there be no foundation for it. When millions of men have entertained a belief for thousands of years, the probability is that an opinion so generally held is supported by some positive facts, and founded upon a long course of observations justified by events. However well I may think of my own intelligence, I can scarcely bring myself to believe that so many persons, of whom some at any rate were noted in their day for their great mental powers and lucid intellects, were merely under a gross delusion, and that I alone see clearly."

"Your argument is an easy one to refute," interposed Miss Ward. "Was not Polytheism the religion of Hesiod, of Homer, of Aristotle, of Plato, of Socrates even, who sacrificed a cock to *Æsculapius*, and of a host of others of incontestible genius?"

"Doubtless; but there is no one who now sacrifices bulls to Jupiter."

"No; they prefer to turn them into beefsteaks," sententially observed the commodore, whom the custom of destroying the juicy limbs of the victims by burning them to ashes had always disgusted when he read about it in his Homer.

"No one any longer offers doves to Venus, or peacocks to Juno, or goats to Bacchus. Christianity has done away with the marble visions with which Greece peopled her Olympus. Truth has dissipated error; but yet an infinitude of people still fear the effects of the *fascino*, or, to give it its popular name, the *jettatura*."

"It doesn't surprise me that ignorant people should believe in such things," said Miss Ward, "but really I am astonished to find a man of your birth and education sharing in such a belief."

"I know of more than one who, while he professes unbelief in it, keeps a pair of horns nailed over his window, and never goes out unprotected by amulets. For my own part I am not ashamed to frankly confess that when I meet a *jettatore* I cross

over to the other side of the road, and that, if I cannot avoid his glance, I try my best to render it harmless by the conventional gesture. I make no more hesitation about it than a *lazzarone* would under similar circumstances, and I have hitherto always remained unharmed. Numerous strange occurrences have taught me not to despise these precautions."

Miss Alicia Ward was a Protestant, brought up in full liberty to philosophize upon everything; she admitted nothing save after due examination, and her logical mind rejected all that was not susceptible of mathematical proof. She was greatly surprised by what the count had said. At first she fancied that he was merely joking, but his calm tone and air of conviction forced her to alter this opinion, though without convincing her of anything further.

"I grant you," she said, "that this superstition exists, that it is widely spread, that you are quite sincere in your fear of the evil eye, and that you are not trying to amuse yourself at the expense of a poor foreigner's simplicity, but give me some physical proof of the possibility of such a thing being true, for I will confess to you, even though it should make you think that I am totally devoid of all poetry in my nature, I am very incredulous. The fantastical, the mysterious, the occult, the inexplicable, have but very little sway over me."

"You will not deny, Miss Alicia," resumed the count, "the power of the human eye. In it the light of heaven is combined with the reflection of the soul. The pupil is a lens which concentrates the rays of life, and the intellectual electricity rushes out from this narrow aperture. Cannot a woman's look pierce the hardest heart? Does not the glance of a hero animate a whole army? Does not the gaze of the surgeon quell a madman like a cold douche bath? Cannot a mother's look make even lions recoil?"

"You argue your cause with eloquence," replied Miss Ward, shaking her pretty head, "but you must forgive me if I still retain my doubts."

"And then, too, is the bird hat, quivering with terror and

uttering piercing cries, flutters down from the top of a tree, whence it could easily fly away, to slip into the mouth of the serpent that is holding it fascinated, is it also yielding itself up to a mere superstition? Has it heard, do you think, feathered gossips chattering in their nests of *jettatura*? Do not many important results arise from causes which are inappreciable to our organs? Are the germs of marsh-fever, of the plague, of cholera, visible? No eye can detect the electric fluid on the lightning conductor, yet the thunder-cloud is robbed of its power to harm! Why should it be absurd to suppose that baleful or propitious rays should shoot from the blue or grey discs of men's eyes? Why should not their influence be harmful or beneficial according to the manner in which they are emitted, and the angle at which they strike the object on which they fall?"

"It seems to me," said the commodore, "that there is really something plausible in the count's theory. I myself have never been able to look into a toad's yellow eyes without feeling an intolerable heat in my stomach, just as though I had taken an emetic, and yet the poor reptile had more reason to be afraid than I, who could have crushed the life out of it with a blow from my heel."

"Ah, uncle," exclaimed Alicia, "if you are going to take Signor d'Altavilla's side, I shall be beaten. I'm not strong enough to fight against you. Though I could say a great deal against this theory of ocular electricity which no scientist has ever mentioned, still I'll admit it for the moment, if the count will tell me what power those immense horns that he so kindly sent me can have to ward off its baleful effects."

"Just the same power as the point of the lightning-conductor has to draw off the electric fluid," replied Altavilla. "In exactly the same way the sharp tips of these horns, when the jettatore's gaze is fixed upon them, drain away the maleficent fluid and rob it of its dangerous electricity. The fingers of the hand stretched out in front of one and the coral amulets produce the same effect."

"All this sounds very strange," Miss Ward now said, "but I gather from it that you fear I am in danger of being harmed by some very baleful *jettatore*, and that you have sent me these horns as a protection."

"I do fear it, Miss Alicia," replied the count in a tone of profound conviction.

"I should like to see one of those evil-eyed blackguards trying to harm my niece!" cried the commodore. "Though I sha'n't see sixty again, I haven't forgotten how to use my fists." And the old gentleman clenched them energetically as he spoke.

"Two fingers will be sufficient, sir," said Altavilla, putting the commodore's hand into the proper position. "Generally speaking, the *jettatura* is involuntary. It is unconsciously exercised by those who possess the fatal gift, and frequently the *jettatori* themselves, when they discover their baleful power, deplore its effects more than any one else. They are consequently to be avoided, and not maltreated; and their influence can always be diminished, if not entirely destroyed, by the presence of horns, by bifurcated branches of coral, or by extending the fingers."

"It is really very strange," remarked the commodore, who was impressed in spite of himself by Altavilla's tone of calm conviction.

"I had no idea I stood in such danger of *jettatori*. I scarcely leave this terrace, except when I take a drive of an evening with my uncle to the Villa Reale; and I have never seen anything to justify your entertaining such suspicions," said the young girl, whose curiosity was now aroused, though her incredulity remained unshaken. "To whom do your suspicions attach themselves?"

"They are not suspicions, Miss Ward," replied the young Neapolitan count; "I am quite certain about the matter."

"For mercy's sake reveal to me the name of the fatal being," exclaimed Alicia with a slight shade of mockery in her tone. Altavilla made no reply

"It is just as well to know whom to be on one's guard against," interposed the commodore.

The young Neapolitan count seemed to be absorbed in deep thought. Then he rose from his seat, and, standing in front of the commodore, he bowed respectfully to him. "Mr Ward," he said, "I ask you to bestow upon me your niece's hand."

At this unexpected request, Alicia's face was suffused with a deep blush, and the commodore's turned almost scarlet. The Count d'Altavilla might certainly well aspire to Miss Ward's hand. He belonged to one of the oldest and noblest families in Naples; he was handsome, young, rich, well received, a thorough gentleman both in manners and appearance. There was nothing outrageous in his request, but it came so suddenly and in such a strange fashion, led up to in no way by the conversation, that the amazement of the uncle and niece was not to be wondered at. Altavilla, indeed, appeared neither surprised nor discouraged, and he seemed to be awaiting a reply in calm confidence.

"My dear count," the commodore at last began, recovering a little from his confusion, "your proposal surprises me as much as it honours me. I really hardly know what to say to you, as I have had no opportunity of consulting my niece. We were talking of *fascino*, *jettatura*, horns, amulets, open and closed hands, and all sorts of other things which have nothing to do with marriage, when you suddenly ask me for Alicia's hand! Your request is so very inconsequential that you must forgive me if my ideas are not very clear just now on the matter. The match would certainly be a very proper and suitable one, but I believe that my niece has formed other intentions. It is true that an old sea-dog like myself cannot tell very clearly what is going on in a young girl's heart——"

Alicia, noticing that her uncle was hesitating as to what he should next say, now took advantage of his momentary silence to bring the embarrassing scene to a conclusion.

"Count," she said to the Neapolitan, "when a loyal-hearted man honourably asks a girl's hand in marriage, she has no reason to feel offended, but she may have reason to be surprised by the strange manner in which the offer is made. I was begging

you to tell me the name of the alleged *jettatore*, whose influence you fear may prove injurious to me, and then you abruptly make a request of my uncle, the reason for which I cannot fathom."

"The reason is," replied Altavilla, "that a gentleman does not willingly turn informer, and that only a husband is capable of defending his wife. Take some days, I beg of you, to think the matter over. During that time, I hope, the horns placed in a conspicuous position will suffice to protect you from all injury." After saying this, the count rose up, made a profound bow, and then took his leave.

As Vicè, the tawny servant with the frizzy hair, came to take away the tea-pot and cups, she overheard, while slowly ascending the terrace steps, the close of this conversation. She cherished all the feeling of aversion for Paul d'Aspremont that a peasant woman, scarcely tamed by two or three years of domestic service, can entertain towards a *forestiere* suspected of *jettatura*. On the other hand, she had the greatest admiration for Count d'Altavilla, and could not conceive it possible that Miss Ward should prefer to him a pale and delicate young man whom she, Vicè, would not have chosen, even if he had not had the *fascino*. So, not appreciating the count's delicacy, and desirous of withdrawing her mistress, whom she loved, from a baleful influence, she bent close to Miss Ward's ear, and whispered into it:

"I can tell you the name which Count d'Altavilla conceals from you."

"I forbid you to mention it to me, Vicè, if you wish to retain my favour," replied Alicia. "All these superstitions are really quite wicked, and I will brave them like a Christian girl who fears God only."

CHAPTER VII.

“‘*JETTATORE! Jettatore!*’ Those words were certainly addressed to me,” thought Paul d’Aspremont, as he returned to the hotel. “I haven’t the least idea what they mean, but they undoubtedly seem to possess some insulting or jeering sense. What is there about me so singular, or so unwonted, or ridiculous, as to excite such an unfavourable demonstration? It seems to me, though one is never a particularly good judge of one’s self, that I am neither handsome nor plain, neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin, and that I certainly might pass unnoticed in a crowd. There is nothing eccentric about my dress. I don’t wear a turban decorated with lighted candles like Monsieur Jourdain in the ‘Bourgeois Gentilhomme,’ or a jacket with a golden sun embroidered on the back of it; nor do I have a negro playing cymbals to precede me. My individuality, too, is quite unknown in Naples, and is concealed beneath the regulation dress of modern civilisation; and I resemble all the fashionables who are promenading in the Toledo or about the Palace, except, perhaps, that I show a little less scarf, a little less pin, a little less embroidery on my shirt, a little less waistcoat and gold chain, and a good deal less frizziness about my hair.

“Perhaps, indeed, my hair isn’t as curly as it ought to be! I’ll get the hotel hair-dresser to touch it up with the tongs to-morrow. But still, the people here must be quite accustomed to seeing foreigners; and trifling differences of dress are not sufficient to account for the mysterious word and singular gesture which my appearance provokes. I have noticed, too, an expression of antipathy and fear in the eyes of people as they get out of my way. What can I possibly have done to offend them, seeing that I have never met them before? A traveller, a shadow, who just passes on his way to be seen no more, is received everywhere with indifference, unless he happens to wander into some far-off region where he appears as a type of

an unknown race. But here, the steamboat turns out upon the quay thousands of tourists, from whom I differ in no respect whatever; and who bother themselves about them except the hotel-keepers, guides, and *facchini*? I haven't murdered my brother, for I haven't got one, and I cannot be marked with the brand of Cain; and yet men seem disturbed at my appearance, and hurry out of my way. I have never noticed my having produced such an effect in Paris, or London, or Vienna, or in any of the other cities which I have visited. I have sometimes, indeed, been considered proud and haughty and morose, and it has been said that I affected the English sneer, but everywhere I have been accorded the reception due to a gentleman, and my advances, rare though they have been, have been the better received on account of my habitual reserve. A three days' voyage from Marseilles to Naples cannot have so transformed me as to make me repulsive or ridiculous—me whom more than one woman has graciously looked upon, and who has been able to touch the heart of Alicia Ward, that charming girl, that almost celestial being!”

These reflections had the effect of calming Paul d'Aspremont in some degree, and he came to the conclusion that he had given to the exaggerated gestures of the Neapolitans, the most gesticulatory people in the world, a meaning which they did not really possess. When he reached the hotel it was late. All the visitors, except Paul, had retired to their respective apartments; and Gelsomina, one of the women servants whose portraits we sketched when describing the conference held in the kitchen under the presidency of Virgilio Falsacappa, was waiting for Paul to return, so that she might fasten the door. Nanella, the other maid, whose turn it really was to sit up, had begged her braver comrade to take her place, being unwilling to meet the *forestiere* suspected of *jettatura*. Gelsomina had taken every precaution. An enormous bunch of amulets bristled on her bosom, and five little coral horns hung quiveringly from her ear-rings. She had already got her hand bent, with the index and little fingers held in such a correct position as would certainly have

received the approbation of the reverend Andréa de Jorio, the author of "*Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire Napoletano.*"

The brave Gelsomina, concealing her hand behind a fold of her skirt, gave Monsieur d'Aspremont his candle, and turned upon him such a keen and persistent, and almost defiant glance of so singular an expression, that the young man drooped his eyes, a circumstance which seemed to afford the girl much gratification. As she stood there upright and motionless, holding out the candle with a statuesque gesture, her face illuminated with a line of light and her eyes fixed and glistening, she looked like the ancient Nemesis seeking to disconcert some guilty wretch. When Paul had gone up the staircase and the sound of his steps had died away in the distance, Gelsomina raised her head with an air of triumph.

"I've made that uncanny gentleman keep his looks to himself," she said. "May Saint Januarius confound him! However, I'm sure no harm will come to me."

Paul slept badly, and his sleep was disturbed. He was tormented by all kinds of strange dreams arising from the ideas which had filled his mind before going to bed; and he saw himself surrounded by a crowd of threatening, hideous faces full of an expression of hate, anger, and fear. Presently the faces faded away, and he saw long fingers, fleshless and bony, with swollen knuckles, piercing the gloom and glowing with a ruddy infernal light, and pointing menacingly at him with cabalistic signs. The nails of these fingers were curved like tigers' claws or vultures' talons, and they approached nearer and nearer to his face, and seemed to be on the point of scooping his eyes from their sockets. By a supreme effort he succeeded in dashing them aside as they fluttered against him as though equipped with wings. Then these taloned hands were succeeded by a hideous apparition of whitened skulls of bulls and buffaloes and stags, animated by a ghostly life, that attacked him with their horns and antlers and forced him to throw himself into the sea, where his body was torn and gashed by a forest of pointed and

forked branches of coral. Then a wave washed him, bruised and crushed and half dead, to the shore; and then he saw athwart the fainting trance into which he had fallen a lovely head bending tenderly over him. It was Alicia, who seemed to be making vain efforts to draw further up the shore his body which the sea was striving to suck back into its depths again, and she besought assistance from Vicè the tawny woman-servant, assistance which the latter refused with a savage laugh. Then Alicia's arms grew exhausted, and Paul was swept back again into the sea.

These vague and horrible visions, and others even still more confused and intangible, recalling the sketchy visionary phantoms flitting through the shadowy gloom of Goya's aquatints, tortured the sleeper till dawn began to glimmer. His soul, lightened by the temporary annihilation of his body, seemed to be able to divine what his waking mind could not understand, and to be attempting to represent in visible imagery the thoughts that were struggling in it. When Paul got up, quite exhausted by his disturbed night, he was troubled and ill at ease as though he felt that he was on the verge of some disaster, typified by his horrible dreams which he dared not attempt to interpret too closely. He closed his eyes and his ears to cut off sight and sound, and buried himself in his own miserable thoughts. He had never felt so wretched before. He doubted even Alicia herself. The Neapolitan count's air of happy infatuation, the complacency with which the young girl listened to him, the commodore's looks of approbation, all came back to his memory, supplemented by a thousand torturing details, and overwhelmed his heart with a flood of bitterness, still further increasing his miserable melancholy.

Light has the privilege of dissipating the painful disquietude caused by nocturnal dreams and visions. When the day-god darts his golden rays through the interstices of the window-curtains, then Smarra sulkily shakes his bat-like wings and flies away. The sun was shining with joyful brilliance; the sky was purely blue and unflecked by a cloud, and the azure of the bay

gleamed with millions of ripples of sheeny gold. Paul's mind gradually recovered its calmness, and he began to forget his disturbing dreams and the strange fancies and impressions of the night ; or, if he thought of them, it was only to accuse himself of wild mental extravagance. He went off to Chiaja to amuse himself by watching the eager excitement of a Neapolitan crowd. The dealers were crying out their wares in odd sounding phrases couched in the popular dialect, quite unintelligible to Paul, who only knew the orthodox Italian, while they gesticulated in a frantic and excited fashion quite unknown in the north ; but every time that Paul stopped in front of a shop, the proprietor's face assumed a look of alarm, and he muttered something in a low voice, and darted out his little and index fingers as though he wanted to stab the stranger with them, while the women, showing greater boldness, assailed him with abuse, and shook their fists at him

CHAPTER VIII.

MONSIEUR D'ASPREMONT'S first thought on hearing the insulting cries of the crowd of Chiaja was that he was merely the object of one of those outbursts of coarse burlesque abuse with which the fish-wives assail well-dressed persons who happen to pass through the market ; but such unmistakable abhorrence and such genuine fear were to be detected in the expression of their countenances that he was obliged to give up this interpretation of the matter. He again heard the word *jettatore* which had previously struck his ear at the San Carlino Theatre ; and this time it was uttered in a menacing fashion. The young man now slowly retired, with his gaze, the cause of so much trouble, no longer directed upon anyone. Skirting alongside the houses, to keep himself as much as possible out of notice, Paul presently reached a second-hand book-stall. He stopped and took up

several books one after another, and pretended to be engaged in reading them. His back was turned to the passers-by, and his face, being half concealed by the book he was holding, he gave no opportunity for further insults. For a moment he had felt strongly inclined to attack the abusive crowd with his stick, but the vague superstitious fear which was beginning to lay hold of him held him back. He remembered that once having struck at an insolent coachman with a slight switch he had hit him on the temple and killed him on the spot, an involuntary murder which he had never ceased to deeply regret. After having taken up and laid down several volumes, he chanced upon Signor Niccolo Valetta's "*Treatise on Jettatura*." The title seemed to be burning before his eyes in letters of fire, and he felt that it was fate that had placed the book in his hands. He tossed the dealer, who was watching him with a suspicious glance and fingering two or three black horns amongst the charms on his chain, the six or eight carlins asked for the volume, and then hurried off to the hotel and shut himself up in his room to read the book which was to enlighten him and to confirm the fears which had been haunting him since his arrival in Naples.

Signor Valetta's treatise is as widely circulated in Naples as the "*Secrets of the great Albert*," "*The Etteila*," or the popular "*Dream-Books*" are in Paris. In it Valetta defines *jettatura*, describes by what signs it may be recognized and by what means its baleful effects may be counteracted. He divides *jettatori* into three classes, according to the degree of injury of which they are capable, and discusses at length every question connected with this grave subject. If D'Aspremont had picked this volume up in Paris, he would have casually turned over its pages as though it were some old chap-book full of ridiculous stories, and he would have laughed at the author's serious treatment of such oldwives' tales. But in his present unnatural and excited state of mind, predisposed to credulity by a host of small incidents, he read it with a secret horror, as though he had unawares found himself spelling out of some magician's book a summons for the dead to appear, or some other terrible cabalistic conjurations.

Though he had made no attempt to penetrate them, the secrets of hell were now revealing themselves to him; he could no longer prevent himself from learning them, and he was finally made aware of his fatal power. He was a *jettatore*! There could be no doubt about it. He examined himself in the mirror, and recognised the presence of every distinctive sign described by Valetta.

It sometimes happens that a man who has hitherto believed himself perfectly hale and sound, opens by chance, or to wile away a few unoccupied moments, a medical treatise, and reading in it the description of some disease, recognises the symptoms of it in himself. In the light of his fatal knowledge he can now detect every sign of the malady making its presence known in some obscure organ of his body whose workings had hitherto never attracted his attention; and his cheeks grow pale as he recognises the nearness of that death which he had thought was so far away. It was just such a feeling as this that Paul now experienced. Standing in front of the mirror, he scrutinized himself with a gaze of terrible intensity. The inharmonious perfection of his face, made up of separate beauties of features which are not usually found together, now made him look more than ever like a fallen angel, as it glared out upon him from the gloomy depths of the mirror. The fibrous streaks in his eyes became twisted like writhing serpents, and his eyebrows quivered like the bowstring which has just discharged a death-dealing arrow. The pallid furrow on his forehead seemed like the scar left by a thunderbolt, and the flames of hell seemed to be glowing in his lurid locks; while the marble pallor of his skin threw into greater relief each feature of his truly fear-inspiring physiognomy. Paul felt afraid of himself. It seemed to him that the emanations from his eyes, reflected back by the mirror, were penetrating him like poisoned darts. Picture to yourself Medusa gazing at her own awful spell-casting head in the tawny sheen of a brazen buckler!

It will perhaps be objected as scarcely credible that a young man of the world, imbued with modern science, who had

lived in the midst of the scepticism of modern civilisation, should attach serious weight to a popular superstition, and believe himself endowed with a mysterious power for evil. But to an objection of this sort it may be replied that there is an irresistible magnetism in general opinion which penetrates one in spite of one's self, and against which a single mind cannot always successfully contend. A man may arrive at Naples scoffing contemptuously at *jettatura*, and yet he ends by making himself bristle with horned amulets, and flies in terror before the approach of any one who is suspected of the baleful power.

Paul d'Aspremont found himself in a still graver position ; he himself had the *fascino*, and everyone avoided him, or made in his presence the preventive gestures recommended by Signor Valetta. Although his reason revolted against such a conclusion, he could not refuse to recognise that all the signs which were described as characterising a *jettatore* were to be found in himself. The human mind, even the most enlightened, always retains one gloomy corner where the hideous chimeras of credulity crouch, and where the bats of superstition keep a clinging hold with their feet. Ordinary life is so full of insoluble problems, that what might at first sight seem impossible may grow to appear even probable. Everything may be believed, and everything may be denied. From a certain point of view the events of dreams are as actual as real facts.

Paul felt himself penetrated by an overwhelming sadness. He was a monster ! Although endowed with the most affectionate instincts and the kindest nature, he carried misfortune about with him. His glance, charged against his will with poison, had a disastrous effect upon those on whom he looked even with the most benevolent thoughts. He had the terrible gift of collecting, concentrating, and distilling the morbid miasmas, the dangerous electricities, and the fatal influences of the atmosphere, to shoot them out like poisoned darts around him. Many circumstances of his previous life, which had hitherto seemed obscure to him, and of which he had vaguely

accused fortune, now became painfully clear to him. He recalled to mind all sorts of enigmatical misadventures, inexplicable misfortunes and catastrophes of which he now possessed the key. Various strange coincidences occurred to his mind, and confirmed him in the painful opinion he had formed of himself.

He went over his past life year by year. He thought of his mother who had died in giving him birth; of the unhappy fate of his little school-friends, the dearest of whom had killed himself by falling from a tree up which he, Paul, was watching him climb; of the boating expedition on which himself and a couple of comrades had started so joyously, and from which he had returned alone, after desperate efforts to recover from the reeds the bodies of the poor lads who had been drowned by the capsizing of the boat; and of the fencing-bout, when the tip of his foil broke off just below the button, and his weapon became transformed into a rapier, with which he very dangerously wounded his adversary, a young man of whom he was especially fond. These misfortunes were certainly all capable of rational explanation, and Paul had hitherto so interpreted them; but what had previously seemed to him to be accidental and fortuitous, appeared to him to have another origin, now that he had read Valetta's book,; the fatal influence of the *fascino*, the *jettatura*, surely had a share in all these catastrophes. Such a succession of misfortunes all connected with a single person, could not be *natural*.

Another and more recent circumstance, with all its painful details, now occurred to his mind, and in no small degree tended to confirm him in his distressing belief. When in London, he had frequently attended Her Majesty's Opera-House, where he had been particularly struck by the gracefulness of a young English *danseuse*. Though her appearance excited in him no deeper emotion than the sight of a charming face and figure in a painting or an engraving would have done, he followed her with his eyes as she skimmed in and out amongst her comrades in the mazy labyrinth of their choreo-

graphic manœuvres. He felt an attraction in her sweet sad face, in the delicate pallor of her complexion, which the animation of the dance never coloured with a flush ; in her fair hair, silky and sheeny, crowned, according to the part she was playing, with flowers or stars, in her far-off look that seemed to lose itself in space ; in the virginal chastity of her shoulders that trembled beneath the scrutiny of opera-glasses ; in her legs that seemed to toss upwards with unwilling reluctance their protecting clouds of gauzy drapery, and which gleamed beneath their silken coverings like the marble limbs of an ancient statue. Every time that she passed in front of the footlights, he greeted her with some little sign of furtive admiration, or placed his opera-glasses to his eyes to get a better view of her.

One evening the *danseuse*, circling round rapidly in a whirling waltz, approached too near to the sparkling line of fire which separates the real world from the ideal one. The airy drapery of her sylph's wings quivered like the pinions of a dove preparing to take flight. One of the gas flames forked out its blue and yellow tongue, and licked the gauzy material. In a moment a sheet of fire enveloped the young girl, who went on dancing for a few seconds like a will o' the wisp in the midst of a lurid glow, and then rushed to the wings, stupefied and wild with terror, roasted alive in her blazing raiment. Although Paul had been intensely affected by this sad catastrophe, his sorrow had been free from all remorse ; and in no way had he blamed himself for an accident which he regretted more than anyone. Now, however, he was convinced that the persistency with which he had followed the young girl with his gaze, had had much to do with the charming creature's death. He looked upon himself as her murderer ; he felt horrified at himself, and wished that he had never been born.

A violent reaction presently succeeded this state of prostration, he broke out into a hysterical laugh and tossed Valetta's book to the devil.

"Certainly," he cried, "I am going crazy ! The Naples sun

must have affected my brain. What would my club-friends say if they only knew that I was seriously discussing with myself the amazing question as to whether I was or was not—a *jettatore* ? ”

John now knocked gently at the door, Paul opened it, and the tiger, who was a rigid precisian in the proper performance of his duties, handed him a note from Miss Ward on the glazed top of his cap, apologizing for not having been able to secure a silver salver. Monsieur d'Aspremont broke the seal, and read as follows :

“ Are you vexed with me, Paul ? You did not come to see me yesterday evening, and your snow and lemonade melted mournfully away on the table. My ears were on the strain till nine o'clock, listening for the sound of your carriage wheels through the ceaseless chirruping of the crickets and the distant beating of the tambourines. Then I was obliged to give up all hope, and I began to quarrel with the commodore. And so you really find a charm in the black-nosed Pulcinella, in Don Limon and Donna Pangrazia ! for I have learned from my spies that you spent your evening at San Carlino. And those pretended letters of importance ! you never wrote a line of them ! Why couldn't you have frankly confessed that you were foolishly jealous of Count d'Altavilla ? I thought you had more confidence in yourself, and this show of modesty on your part quite touches me. But don't feel any fear ; Signor d'Altavilla is too handsome, and I have no fancy for these amuletted Apollos. I ought to manifest a complete indifference and pretend that I never noticed your absence ; but in truth I found the time very long, and I was so very bad tempered and irritable, that I nearly struck Vicè who was laughing like a mad thing, why, I can't tell.—A. W.”

This playful letter brought Paul's abstracted thoughts back to the realities of life again. He dressed himself, and ordered the carriage to be brought round ; and very soon the *Voltairea*

Scazziga was cracking his sceptical whip over the ears of his horses who started off at a gallop over the lava pavement, and cut their way through the always dense crowd on the quay of Santa Lucia.

"What bee have you got in your bonnet, Scazziga? You'll meet with some accident presently, if you don't take care!" cried Monsieur d'Aspremont. The coachman turned briskly round to reply, and Paul's sharp glance lighted full on his face. A stone which Scazziga had not noticed, now gave one of the wheels such a jerk as to throw him from his box, though he still retained his hold of the reins. Nimble as a monkey, he sprang up again into his seat, his forehead bossed by a swelling lump as big as a hen's egg.

"The deuce take me if I turn round again when you speak to me!" he muttered between his teeth. "Timberio, and Falsacappa and Gelsomina were right; the man's a *jettatore*! I'll bring a pair of horns to-morrow. Even if they don't do me any good, they certainly can't do me any harm."

This little incident caused Paul much uneasiness, and involved his mind again in those magic meshes from which he was anxious to keep it free. Stones get in the way of carriage wheels every day, and awkward drivers are easily jolted from off their seats. Such circumstances were of common enough occurrence; there was nothing at all out of the way in them. But still the *effect* had followed the *cause* so nearly; Scazziga's fall had so exactly coincided with the glance he had cast at Paul, that the latter's fears returned again.

"I should like to leave this idiotic country to-morrow," he said to himself, "where my brain seems to shake about in my skull like a dried kernel in its shell. But if I were to confide my fears to Alicia she would only laugh at me; and then the climate of Naples is so beneficial to her. Ah, how well she was before she knew me! That swan's nest floating on the waters which they call England had never brought forth cheeks that glowed with brighter health! Her glistening eyes were radiant with life; vitality seemed bursting out of her satiny flesh-tinted

cheeks ; and a vigorous current of pure rich blood welled through the blue veins of her transparent skin. One could see robust health lying behind her sweet beauty. And now how she has paled and shrunk and changed beneath my gaze ! How frail her delicate hands have become, and what a mournful shadow now broods over the eyes that were once so sparkling and gay ! She looks as though consumption had laid its bony fingers on her shoulder. In my absence her charming colour came back again ; the breath of life circulated freely once more in her lungs which the doctor had sounded with such anxiety. If she were delivered from my influence, she would see a hale old age. Am I not murdering her ? Did she not experience the other evening when I was with her so keen a paroxysm of pain that her cheeks grew as pale as though the icy breath of death had brushed against them ? Am I not making her a victim of *jettatura* without meaning it ? And yet it may be that there is nothing supernatural about it ; many young English girls are inclined to be consumptive."

These reflections occupied Paul d'Aspremont's mind during the whole journey. When he presented himself upon the terrace, the habitual resort of Alicia and her uncle, he saw the immense Sicilian bull's horns, Count d'Altavilla's gift, with their curved and glistening branches. They had been set in the most conspicuous position available. Noticing that Paul was looking at them, the commodore turned blue. This was his way of blushing ; for, less delicate than his niece, he had listened to Vicè's confidences. With a gesture of supreme contempt, Alicia signalled to the servant to take the horns away, and fixed her eyes upon Paul with a glance that was full of courage, and love, and faith.

"Let them stay where they are," said Paul to Vicè, "they are very handsome."

CHAPTER IX.

PAUL'S remark about the horns sent by Count d'Altavilla appeared to please the commodore. Vicè smiled, showing her teeth, her pointed and isolated canines gleaming with fierce brilliancy. Alicia flashed a rapid glance upon her friend, appearing to ask him a question by it, which remained unanswered. There was now an embarrassing silence. There is often a feeling of constraint during the first few minutes of a meeting between even intimate and cordial friends, whose visits to each other are looked forward to, and are repeated day by day. During their periods of absence from each other, though these may last only a few hours, an invisible atmosphere seems to form itself around each of them that repels all attempts at easy familiarity. It is like a wall of perfectly transparent glass which allows the whole landscape to be seen, but through which not even a fly can wing its way. There is nothing visible, but still one feels the presence of an obstacle.

Each of the three members of the little group, usually so entirely at their ease with each other, was preoccupied with silent reflections. The commodore was abstractedly twirling his thumbs; D'Aspremont, with the air of a naturalist trying to classify a fragmentary relic of some unknown species, was keeping his eyes persistently fixed upon the gleaming black points of the horns which he had told Vicè not to take away; while Alicia was fingering the bow of the broad ribbon which girdled her muslin wrapper, affecting to tighten it. Miss Ward herself was the first to break the ice with that liberty of speech enjoyed by young English girls, though they grow so retiring and reserved after marriage.

"Really, Paul, you haven't been at all nice lately. Is your gallantry a plant of cold nature which can only flourish in England, and which shrivels up in the high temperature of this climate? How attentive and devoted you were when we were together in Lincolnshire! Then your words always breathed of

love and your hand was ever on your heart, and you were ready to kneel down and worship your soul's idol ; you were the ideal lover of the story books."

"I still love you, Alicia," replied D'Aspremont in a low voice, and still keeping his eyes fixed on the horns which were hanging against one of the ancient columns that supported the roof of vines.

"You say that in such a lugubrious tone," replied Alicia, "that I should have to be very conceited to be able to believe it. What took your fancy in me, I imagine, was my pale complexion, my general air of transparency, my shadowy vaporous gracefulness. My illness gave me a certain romantic charm which I have lost now."

"You were never more beautiful than you are now, Alicia."

"Words, words, words ! as Shakespeare says. I am so very beautiful, indeed, that you won't even deign to look at me !" Monsieur d'Aspremont's eyes, indeed, had not once been turned towards the young girl. "Ah, yes," she said with a deep sigh, playfully exaggerated, "I can see very well that I have developed into a great strong country-girl with coarse red cheeks, without any pretension to delicacy or refined appearance.

"You take a pleasure in depreciating yourself, Alicia," said Paul, drooping his eyes.

"It would really be much better if you would frankly confess that you think me hideous. It's altogether your fault, commodore, with your chickens' wings, your juicy cutlets and steaks, your little glasses of Canary, your horse-exercise and sea-bathing and gymnastics, you have developed in me this fatal condition of rustic health and robustness which has completely dissipated all Monsieur d'Aspremont's poetical illusions."

"You are distressing Monsieur d'Aspremont, and you are making fun of me," replied the commodore in answer to this attack. "Beef-steak is a capital thing, and Canary-wine never hurt anyone."

"What a sad disappointment for you, my poor Paul, to have parted from sprite, a fairy ; and then to find, upon your return,

what doctors and relations call a healthy and vigorous young woman! Listen to me now, since you no longer have the courage to look at me, and prepare to groan with horror. I weigh seven ounces more than I did when I left England!"

"Eight ounces!" proudly interposed the commodore, who lavished all the care of the tenderest mother upon Alicia.

"Is it really eight? Oh, you wicked uncle, you are quite determined to disenchant Monsieur d'Aspremont!" exclaimed Alicia, affecting a playful despondency.

While the young girl was thus challenging him with a coquetry in which she would never have permitted herself to indulge, even towards the man to whom she was engaged, except for some grave reason, Monsieur d'Aspremont, a prey to his one fixed idea, and fearful of injuring Alicia by his gaze, either kept his eyes fixed upon the talismanic horns or else let them wander vaguely over the far-reaching expanse of blue water visible from the top of the terrace. He was asking himself if it was not his duty to flee from Alicia, even at the cost of appearing destitute both of fidelity and honour, and to go away and pass the remainder of his life in some desert island where his *jettatura* would be unable to find a victim to expend itself upon.

"I know what it is," Alicia said, continuing her playful lecture, "that is making you so gloomy and mopish. Our marriage is fixed for a month from now, and you shrink from the idea of becoming the husband of a poor country-girl who has not the least pretence to refinement of appearance. Very well, sir, I'll give you back your promise, and you may go and marry my cousin Sarah Templeton, who eats pickles and drinks vinegar to make herself slim."

She laughed with the bright silvery laugh of youth at her own suggestion, and the commodore and Paul freely joined in her hilarity. When her outbreak of nervous merriment had quite died away, she stepped up to d'Aspremont, and, taking hold of his hand, she led him to the piano at the corner of the terrace. Then, opening a book of music on the desk, she said to him:

"You don't seem in a humour for talking to-day, dear, and so you must sing what you don't care to say. You shall take a part in this duet with me. You will find the accompaniment quite easy to play."

Paul sat down on the music-stool, and Alicia stood behind him, so as to be able to see the score. The commodore leaned back in his chair, and stretched out his legs, assuming a position of anticipatory beatitude, for he had pretensions to dilettanteism, and affected to adore music ; but by the time the sixth bar was reached he was sleeping the sleep of the just ; a sleep which, in spite of all his niece's raillery, he persisted in calling an ecstasy, even though he sometimes broke out into loud snores ; a scarcely ecstatic symptom ! The duet was a bright vivacious melody on words by Metastasio ; and we cannot describe it better than by comparing it to a butterfly winging its way, after several trials, through a ray of sunshine. Music has power to drive away low spirits, and after a few bars Paul thought no more about conjuring fingers, magic horns, and coral amulets ; he quite forgot all about Signor Valetta's terrible book and his own miserable reflections on *jettatura*. His soul soared up gaily with Alicia's voice into an atmosphere of undimmed brightness. The grasshoppers had grown silent, as though they were listening, and a rising breeze from the sea wafted the notes along with the petals that fell from the flowers blooming in the vases on the edge of the terrace.

"My uncle is sleeping as soundly as the seven sleepers in their cave. If it wasn't his usual custom, it wouldn't be very flattering to our musical abilities," said Alicia, closing the score. "While he is asleep will you come and take a turn round the garden with me, Paul ? I have never shown you my Paradise yet."

She took down a large straw hat which was hanging by the strings to a nail in one of the columns. Alicia made profession of the most eccentric principles regarding horticulture. She refused to allow either the flowers to be cut, or the branches to be pruned ; and the villa's great charm for her had been, as we have

already said, the wildly uncultivated state of the garden. The two young people forced themselves a way through the midst of the branches, which closed behind them again as soon as they had passed. Alicia was walking in front, and she laughed gaily as the branches of the oleanders which she displaced sprung back and lashed Paul as he came on behind her. She had scarcely advanced twenty yards, when the green fingers of a bough, as though actuated by a spirit of vegetable mischief, caught her straw hat, and sprang up with it so high into the air that Paul could not recover it. The foliage, however, was fortunately very thick, and only a few sparse sunbeams were able to find their way through the chinks in the verdure.

"There, this is my favourite retreat," said Alicia, pointing out to Paul a fragment of rock, picturesquely splintered, and overshadowed by a thicket of orange trees, citrons, mastic trees, and myrtles. She now sat down in a depression of the rock having the shape of a seat, and signalled to Paul to come and kneel in front of her on the thick dry moss which bordered the foot of the rock.

"Put your hands in mine, and look me straight in the face," she said. "In a month's time I shall be your wife. Tell me why your eyes shun mine." Paul, indeed, relapsing into his thoughts of *jettatura*, had averted his gaze from her.

"Are you afraid of reading in them some guilty or unfaithful thought? You know that my soul has been yours ever since the day when you delivered your letter of introduction to my uncle in the drawing-room at Richmond. I am one of those loving-hearted English girls, romantic and resolute, who can absorb in a minute a love which will last through life, and perhaps longer than life; and she who knows how to love, knows also how to die. Fix your eyes on mine; I wish it. Don't droop your eyelids or turn aside your gaze, or I shall think that a gentleman who should fear only his God has stooped to be afraid of a vile superstition. Fix upon me that gaze which you think is so terrible, and which I find so sweet, for I read in it your love, and tell me if you still think me pretty enough to

dare to venture to take me into the park, after we are married, in an open carriage."

Paul, quite overcome by the girl's pleading, fixed upon her a long glance full of passion and adoration. Suddenly Alicia turned pale; a spasm of pain shot through her heart like a piercing arrow. She felt as though something were snapping inside her bosom, and she hastily raised her handkerchief to her lips. A crimson drop stained the fine cambric, which the girl hurriedly crumpled in her hand.

"Thank you, Paul, thank you very much; you have made me very happy, for I was beginning to fear that you had ceased to love me.

CHAPTER X.

ALICIA'S hasty attempt to conceal her handkerchief had not been prompt enough to prevent Monsieur d'Aspremont from seeing the red stain, and a deadly pallor suffused his cheeks at the irrefutable proof of his fatal power which had just been presented to him, and the most sinister ideas flashed through his mind. He even thought of committing suicide. Was it not his duty to put out of existence and annihilate a man who was the involuntary cause of so many disastrous events? He would have borne with equanimity the hardest tribulation that affected himself alone, and could have gone on bearing the burden of life with resignation, but to be the means of destroying the woman he loved better than anything else in the world, was too horrible!

The brave-hearted girl had crushed down the sharp pang of pain which had followed Paul's gaze, and which had so strangely coincided with Count d'Altavilla's forebodings. A less resolute mind might have been shaken by this result, which, even if not supernatural, was difficult to explain. Alicia, as we have said, was a religious girl and by no means superstitious. With her unshakeable faith in her creed she threw aside as old-wives' tales all these stories of mysterious influences, and laughed at the

most deeply-rooted popular superstitions. But even if she had been persuaded of the reality of *jettatura*, and had recognised all its characteristic signs in Paul, her proud and loving heart would not have hesitated for a moment. Paul had been guilty of no action which the most delicate susceptibility could blame, and Miss Ward would have preferred to perish before the gaze that was accounted so fatal rather than prove faithless to a love which she had accepted with her uncle's approbation, and which was soon to be crowned with marriage. Alicia was not unlike some of Shakespeare's chastely bold and maidenly resolute heroines, whose love is not the less pure and faithful from being of quick growth, and whom a single minute suffices to fetter for ever. Her hand had pressed Paul's, and no other man than he should ever clasp it in love. She looked upon her life as having been consecrated to him, and her maiden modesty would have revolted from the mere thought of accepting a new love.

She manifested such a genuine or well-feigned brightness of spirits, as would have deceived the acutest observer; and, bidding Paul, who was still on his knees, come with her, she led him through the tangled maze of flowers and trees, to a spot where a gap in the verdure allowed the azure of the sea to be seen stretching dreamily away in the distance. The sight of its bright peacefulness drove away Paul's gloomy thoughts; and Alicia leaned upon his arm with trusting unreserve, as though she were already his wife. In this pure and silent caress, which would have meant nothing from another girl, but which meant everything from her, she was giving herself formally to him, reassuring him against the fears which were torturing him, and bidding him understand how little she was influenced by any dread of the danger against which she had been warned. Although she had imposed silence upon Vicè, subsequently upon her uncle, and although D'Altavilla, while cautioning her to be on her guard against a baleful influence, had mentioned no name, she had perfectly understood that it was Paul d'Aspremont, to whom allusion was being made. Indeed, the obscure warnings of the handsome Neapolitan could

have reference to no one except the young Frenchman. She had seen, too, that Paul, yielding to the prejudice so widely current in Naples, which makes a *jettatore* of every man whose physiognomy is a little peculiar, had been so inconceivably weak-minded as to allow himself to believe that he was tainted with the *fascino*, turning away from her his eyes that were full of love, for fear of harming her by their gaze. To combat this fixed idea of his, she had brought about the scene which we have just described, the result of which was exactly contrary to what she had intended it to be, for it confirmed Paul more than ever in his fatal monomania.

The two lovers returned to the terrace, where the commodore, still under the effects of the music, was slumbering melodiously on his bamboo chair. Paul took his leave, and Alicia, parodying the Neapolitan gesture of farewell, blew him an imperceptible kiss on the tips of her fingers, as she said "I shall see you again to-morrow, Paul, shall I not?" in a voice that was full of a tender caress. Alicia's beauty was just now brilliantly radiant, there was something almost alarming and supernatural about it, and it struck her uncle as he awoke with a start on Paul's going away. The whites of her eyes assumed tones of burnished silver, making her orbs sparkle like darkly luminous stars; her cheeks were flushed with an ideal roseate glow, of a celestial purity such as no painter ever succeeded in producing on canvas; her brow of sheeny transparency was veined with a network of fine bluish lines, and her whole face seemed permeated with beams of light. She looked as though her soul were forcing its way through her skin.

"How pretty you are looking to-day, Alicia!" exclaimed the commodore.

"How you spoil me, uncle dear; if I am not the most conceited girl in the United Kingdom, it is not your fault. But fortunately I don't believe in flattery, even when it's disinterested."

"Lovely, dangerously lovely!" continued the commodore, speaking to himself. "She reminds me in her every feature

of her poor mother, who died when she was nineteen. Such angels cannot stay long on earth ; a breath seems to waft them away, and invisible wings are fluttering from their shoulders. Their bodies are too white, too roseate, too pure and perfect ; the coarse red blood of life is wanting in their ethereal frames. God, who lends them to the world for a few days, is eager to take them back again. This dazzling beauty saddens me like a foreboding of farewell."

"Well, uncle, since I'm looking so pretty," continued Alicia, noticing the commodore's gloomy looks, "it's time for me to get married. The veil and the wreath will become me just now."

"Get married ! Are you in such a hurry to leave your old red-skin of an uncle, Alicia ?"

"Oh, I sha'n't leave you when I get married ! Haven't we agreed with Paul that we are all to live together ! You know quite well that I could never exist without you."

"Paul ! Paul ! Ah, he hasn't married you yet !"

"No ; but he has your promise, and mine too. You have never yet gone back from your word."

"Yes, he has my promise ; there's no getting out of that," replied the commodore, who seemed much embarrassed.

"The period of six months which you fixed expired some days ago," Alicia now said, her bashful cheeks glowing with a still brighter red, for this conversation, which the condition of affairs necessitated, was distasteful to her sensitive delicacy.

"And so you have been keeping count of the months, have you, you cunning little creature ? Ah, there's no trusting your timid bashful-looking maidens !"

"I love Monsieur d'Aspremont," the young girl said gravely.

"That's just the worst of it !" replied the commodore, who, imbued with the theories of Vicè and d'Altavilla, was not delighted at the thought of having a *jettatore* for a son-in-law.

"I have not two hearts," continued Alicia, "and I shall never have but one love, even if, like my mother, I die at nineteen."

"Die! don't use such painful words, I beseech you!" cried the commodore.

"Have you any fault to find with Monsieur d'Aspremont?"

"No; certainly not."

"Has he disgraced himself in any way whatever? Has he ever shown himself tainted with baseness or falsehood or unfaithfulness? Has he ever insulted a woman or recoiled before a man? Is his escutcheon sullied by any secret stain? Is there anything to make a young girl blush or lower her eyes on taking his arm before the world?"

"Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont is a perfect gentleman, and there is nothing whatever to be alleged against his honour."

"Be quite assured, uncle, that I should give up Monsieur d'Aspremont at once if there were, and go and bury myself in some inaccessible retreat, but for no other reason will I fail to keep a sacred promise," said Alicia in a gentle but firm tone.

The commodore began to twirl his thumbs, a habit in which he was accustomed to find refuge from his embarrassment whenever he was at a loss what to say.

"Why do you manifest such a coolness now towards Paul?" the girl continued. "You used to be so fond of him, and you could scarcely make enough of him when he was staying with us in Lincolnshire, and you told him, with a grasp of your hand that nearly crushed his fingers, that he was an excellent fellow, to whom you would willingly entrust a young girl's happiness."

"Yes, indeed, I used to be very fond of Paul," replied the commodore, troubled by this reminder of the past; "but what is clouded and hazy in the fogs of England, becomes clear and manifest beneath the sunshine of Naples."

"What do you mean?" cried Alicia, in a quivering voice, while all her bright colour suddenly faded from her cheeks, and her face grew as white as that of an alabaster effigy on a tomb.

"That your Paul is a *jettatore*!"

"What! you! my uncle! you, Sir Joshua Ward, a gentle-

man, a Christian, an Englishman, an officer of the Royal Navy, an enlightened and civilised being whose opinion men take on every subject, you who are wise and clever, who read your Bible every evening, are you not afraid to accuse Paul of *jettatura*? Oh, indeed, I didn't expect this of you!"

"My dear Alicia," replied the commodore, "I may be all that you have said when you yourself are not in question, but when a danger, though it be an imaginary one, seems to be threatening you, I become even more superstitious than an Abruzzo peasant, or one of the *lazzarone* on the Mole, or a *Chiaja ostricajo*, or a rustic woman-servant, or even a Neapolitan count. Paul can stare at me with his uncanny eyes as hard as he likes, and I sha'n't flinch before them any more than I should before the point of a sword or the muzzle of a pistol. The *fascino* will only blunt its teeth on my tanned old skin, browned and weather-beaten in every quarter of the world. It is only when you are concerned, my dear niece, that I grow credulous; and I confess that my brow is bathed in cold perspiration when I see that unhappy young man's gaze fixed upon you. He has no wrong intentions, I know quite well, and he loves you better than his life; but it seems to me that his influence has changed your appearance and banished your bright complexion, and that you are suffering from pain which you vainly try to conceal. There are times when I feel inclined to gorge out your Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont's eyes with the horns that Count d'Altavilla gave you."

"My poor dear uncle," replied Alicia, affected by the warm emotion of the commodore, "our lives are in the hands of God; and neither a prince can die in his bed of state, nor a sparrow beneath a roof-tile, before the allotted hour. The *fascino* can do nothing to hasten that hour, and it is impious to believe that a glance that is more or less oblique, can possess the influence you impute to it. Come now, nunkle," she continued, using the affectionate familiarity of the Fool in *King Lear*, "you couldn't really be speaking seriously just now; your love for me disturbed your usually clear judgment. You would never,

surely, tell Monsieur Paul d'Aspermont that you were going to deprive him of your niece's hand, placed in his own by yourself, and that you declined to accept him as a son-in-law, on the amazing pretext that he was—a *jettatore* !”

“By Joshua my patron, who stayed the sun !” cried the commodore, “I shall not mince matters with this fine Monsieur Paul ! I don't care a fig whether I appear ridiculous or absurd, or even faithless ; when your health, nay, your very life, is perhaps at stake. I bound myself to a man, and not to a serpent ! I made a promise ; I acknowledge it, and now I am going to break it. If Monsieur Paul makes a bother about it, I'll do my best to give him satisfaction.” And the commodore, fuming with indignation, threw himself into a lunging attitude quite regardless of the sharp twinges of gout in his toes.

“You will not do that,” said Alicia with quiet dignity as the commodore now let himself drop, quite out of breath, into his bamboo chair, and relapsed into silence. “And even, uncle, if this odious and absurd accusation were true, would it be a sufficient cause for repulsing Monsieur d'Aspremont, and for imputing his misfortune to him as a crime ? Have you not satisfied yourself that any injury he might do would be done entirely against his will, and that there is not a more affectionate and generous and noble soul on earth than his ?”

“People don't marry vampires, however good their intentions may be,” replied the commodore.

“But all that is nothing but a wild and extravagant chimera ! However, what is unfortunately true, is that Paul has taken all this foolish nonsense seriously and really believes in it. He is under a terrible hallucination ; he is convinced of the existence of his fatal powers, and is in fear of himself. Every little accident which formerly he would not have noticed, now tends to confirm him in this conviction. Is it not for me, who am already his wife before God, as I soon shall be, with your blessing dear uncle, before men,—is it not for me to do what I can to calm his over-excited imagination, to drive away these unfounded fancies, to quiet by my certainty of my own safety that haggard

anxiety which is the twin-sister of madness, and to save, that noble troubled soul, that fair imperilled mind, by making it happy ?”

“You are always right, Alicia,” the commodore now replied, “and I, whom you call wise, am nothing but an old fool. I believe that that Vicè of ours is a witch ; she has quite turned my head with her nonsense ; and Count d’Altavilla and his horns and his cabalistical gimcracks appear to me in a very ridiculous light just at present. I feel sure that it was all a stratagem to get rid of Paul, so that the count might be able to marry you himself.”

“It is quite possible that Count d’Altavilla was acting in perfectly good faith. You yourself quite agreed with his views on *jettatura* only a few moments ago,” replied Alicia, with a smile.

“Don’t abuse your advantage, Miss Alicia ; I have not so completely cast aside my old view that I cannot pick it up again. Our best plan, I think, would be to leave Naples by the next steamer, and return quietly to England. When Paul is no longer troubled by the sight of bulls’ horns, and stags’ antlers, and pointed fingers, and coral amulets, and all the other infernal paraphernalia, his imagination will quiet down again, and I myself shall forget all the silly follies which have almost made me false to my word, and commit an action unworthy of an honourable man. You shall marry Paul, as it has been settled so ; you shall set apart the small room and the bedroom on the ground floor at Richmond for my use, and the octagon tower in the house in Lincolnshire, and we will all live happily together. If your health should require a warmer climate, we will take a country house near Tours, or, still better, near Cannes, where, thank God, these damnable superstitions about *jettatura* are unknown. What do you say to my scheme, eh, Alicia ?”

“You have no need of my approbation ; am I not the most obedient of nieces ?”

“Yes ; when I do what you want, you little hypocrite,” re-

plied the commodore with a smile, getting up to return to his room.

Alicia remained for a few minutes longer on the terrace ; but whether it was that what had just taken place had wrought her up into a state of febrile excitement, or that Paul really had exercised upon her the influence which the commodore had feared, the warm breeze brushing against her shoulders, protected only by thin gauze, made her shiver with cold, and in the evening she felt so unwell and chilly that she bade Vicè lay over her feet, cold and white as marble, one of those gaily coloured rugs which are made at Venice.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the morning following the scene related in the last chapter, Alicia, whose sleep had been uneasy and disturbed, scarcely touched with her lips the draught which Vicè brought to her daily, before she languidly put it down on the little table by her bed-side. She was suffering from no actual pain, but she felt completely broken down and exhausted. It was rather a difficulty in living than any definite complaint that seemed to have taken possession of her, and she could scarcely have described what she felt to a doctor. She asked Vicè for a mirror, for a young girl feels anxious about any alteration that illness may cause in her beauty rather than about the illness itself. Her face was extremely pale ; there were merely two little patches of colour, looking like two rose-petals floating on a surface of milk. Her eyes glistened with unwonted brilliance, sparkling with a feverish glow ; but the cherry-red of her lips was a good deal faded, and she bit them with her pearly teeth, hoping to restore the colour to them. She now got up and put on her dressing-gown of white Cashmere, and twined a gauze scarf round her head, for, notwithstanding the heat which was exciting the

grasshoppers to noisy demonstrations, she still felt a little chilly. She made her appearance on the terrace at the usual hour, so as not to arouse the commodore's ever watchful anxiety on her behalf, and even made a pretence of eating at breakfast time, not that she had any appetite, but she knew that the least symptom of indisposition would have been attributed by her uncle to the influence of Paul, and this was what Alicia was anxious above all things to avoid. After breakfast, pretending that the glaring light of the morning fatigued her, she retired to her bedroom, but not without having several times assured the commodore that she was feeling as well as possible.

“ ‘As well as possible!’ I’m rather inclined to doubt that,” muttered the commodore to himself when his niece left him. “She has just got the same nacreous tints around her eyes, and the same little patches of bright colour at the top of her cheeks that her poor mother had, who also persisted in saying that she never felt better in her life. What am I to do? If I separate her from Paul I shall only kill her in another way; it will be best to leave nature to itself. Alicia is so young! But then it is the youngest and prettiest that Death seems to have a grudge against; it is as jealous as a woman. Shall I send for a doctor? But what use would a doctor be to an angel? and indeed, all the disquieting symptoms have disappeared. Ah, if I really thought it was that confounded Paul’s influence that was making my blossom droop and wither, I would throttle him with my own hands? But her mother never underwent the gaze of a *jettatore*, and she is dead. If Alicia were to die! Oh no, it isn’t possible! I have committed no sin against God that he should overwhelm me with such a terrible affliction. Long ere my darling goes, I hope I shall have been laid at rest in the old churchyard at home, and she will come and weep over my grave and offer up a prayer for her old commodore. Really, I don’t know what can be the matter with me this morning, but I’m feeling most confoundedly miserable and mopish!”

In the hope of throwing off his melancholy thoughts, the commodore poured a little rum into his cup of cold tea, and

took up his hookah, an innocent indulgence which he allowed himself only in Alicia's absence, for the young girl's excessively sensitive temperament might have been distressed by the odorous fumes. The scented water in the bowl had scarcely begun to bubble, and the bluish smoke to float up into the air, when Vicè ushered Count d'Altavilla into the room.

"Sir Joshua," said the count, after the ordinary civilities had been exchanged, "have you reflected upon the proposal which I made to you the other day?"

"I have reflected upon it," replied the commodore, "but my promise, you know, has been given to Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont."

"Doubtless it has, but there are circumstances under which a promise may be withdrawn; when a man, for instance, to whom a promise has been given, turns out to be something quite different from what he was originally supposed to be."

"Speak more clearly, count."

"It is extremely distasteful to me to bring a charge against a rival, but after the conversation we have had together, you must surely understand what I mean. Tell me now, if you rejected Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont, would you be willing to accept me as a son-in-law?"

"Certainly; but it is by no means so certain that Miss Ward would consent to such a substitution. She is quite infatuated with this Paul, and it is a good deal my own fault, for I made a great deal of the young fellow before all these foolish stories cropped up. Forgive the adjective, count, but really my brain is quite addled."

"Do you wish your niece to die?" asked the count, in tones of deep emotion.

"Good heavens! my niece die!" cried the commodore, leaping up from his chair, and letting the morocco case of his hookah fall. This chord in Sir Joshua Ward's nature could never be touched without causing it to vibrate violently.

"Do you think, then, that my niece is dangerously ill?"

"Don't be too hasty in taking alarm, Sir Joshua. Miss Alicia may still have a long life before her."

"I am relieved to hear you say that! you had quite upset me."

"But upon one condition only," continued Count d'Altavilla; "and that is, that she sees nothing more of Monsieur Paul d'Aspremont."

"Ah, now, there's that wretched *jettatura* coming to the fore again! Unfortunately, however, Miss Ward doesn't believe in it at all."

"Listen to me," said Count d'Altavilla, in a decided manner. "When I met Miss Alicia for the first time at the Prince of Syracuse's ball, and conceived for her a passion which is as ardent as it is respectful, it was with her radiant health, her joyousness in existence, and her bright liveliness that I was first of all struck. They seemed to render her beauty luminous, and to wrap her round with an atmosphere of content and happiness. This appearance of phosphorescence made her shine like a star, all the other girls, English, Russian, Italian, paled before her, and I had eyes for no one but herself. To her English distinction of appearance, she joined the pure robust grace of the ancient goddesses. Forgive this reference to mythology on the part of a descendant of Greek colonists."

"Ah, yes, indeed, it is true that she was strikingly beautiful," said the commodore, delighted at the count's encomium. "Miss Kate Blount, Lady Eleanor Lilly, and the Princess Feodorowna Bariatinsky nearly had the jaundice from spleen and envy."

"And haven't you observed that her beauty has now assumed a languishing expression, that her features have become unhealthily delicate, that the veins in her hands show more conspicuously blue than they ought to do, and that there is a reedy tone about her voice that is full of a sweet sadness and pathetic vibration. The terrestrial part of her is fading away, and the celestial part is becoming pre-eminent. Miss Alicia is developing an ethereal perfection, which, even at the risk of appearing unpoetically material, I must confess I do not like to see in girls of this world."

The count's words agreed so exactly with Sir Joshua Ward's secret fears that the commodore remained silent for several minutes, and seemed buried in deep thought.

"What you say is quite true," he replied at last; "and, though I often try to persuade myself that I am mistaken, I feel that I cannot really disagree with you."

"I have not said all yet," continued the count. "Did Miss Alicia's health cause you any anxiety before Monsieur d'Aspremont's arrival in England?"

"Never the least! She was the heartiest and merriest girl in the three kingdoms."

"Monsieur d'Aspremont's presence, then, coincides, as you see, with the periods when Miss Alicia's precious health changes for the worse. I do not ask you, a Northerner, to receive implicitly a belief, a prejudice, a superstition if you like, held in our southern land, but you must allow that the facts I have pointed out are strange ones, and call for all your consideration."

"But isn't it possible that Alicia's illness should be natural?" queried the commodore, much shaken by D'Altavilla's plausible reasoning, but still prevented by a kind of English shame from adopting the popular Neapolitan belief.

"Miss Ward is not ill; she is suffering from a sort of poisoned glance, and if Monsieur d'Aspremont is not a *jettatore*, he at least exercises a very baleful influence."

"What can I do? The girl loves Paul, and laughs at the idea of *jettatura*, and says that it is ridiculous to refuse a man for such a reason."

"I have no right to interfere in your niece's concerns; I am neither her brother, nor any other relation, nor her betrothed; but may I make, with your consent, one last effort to rescue her from this fatal influence? Oh, don't be afraid, I will do nothing rash or extravagant. Young as I am, I know very well that a young girl must not be allowed to become the subject of people's talk, and you may trust me to act discreetly. I must ask you, however, to permit me to keep silence at present about my scheme. Have sufficient confidence in my loyalty to believe that

there is nothing in it which the most delicate sense of honour need blush to avow."

"You love my niece very much?" asked the commodore.

"Yes; since I love her hopelessly. You give me leave to act, then?"

"There's no withstanding you, Count d'Altavilla. Well, yes; do your best to save Alicia in your own way. I shall not find it a bad one, I'm sure, and may even consider it a very good one."

The count now rose and took his leave, and directed his coachman to drive him to the Hôtel de Rome. With his elbows leaning on the table, and his head resting in his hands, Paul was buried in the most mournful reflections. He had seen the two or three crimson drops on Alicia's handkerchief, and, still absorbed by his one fixed idea, he was reproaching himself for his murderous love, and blaming himself for accepting the devotion of the young girl, who had resolved to die for him; he was wondering, too, by what superhuman sacrifice he could repay such sublime self-negation. John, the gnome-tiger, interrupted his meditations by entering the room with Count d'Altavilla's card.

"Count d'Altavilla! What can he want with me, I wonder?" exclaimed Paul in great surprise. "At all events, ask him to come in."

When the Neapolitan crossed the threshold, Monsieur d'Aspremont had already veiled his astonishment with that mask of cold indifference beneath which men of the world hide their real thoughts and feelings. With chilly politeness he motioned the count to a chair, and then sat down himself, and waited in silence, with his eyes fixed upon his visitor.

"Sir," commenced the count, playing with the charms on his watch-chain, "what I have to say is so strange, so uncalled-for, and so impertinent, that you will be quite justified in throwing me out of the window. Spare me, however, any such violence, for I am ready to offer you the satisfaction of a gentleman."

"I am all attention, sir; and I shall take advantage of your offer later on if what you say to me offends me," replied Paul, without moving a muscle of his face.

"You are a *jettatore*!"

Upon hearing these words, a greenish pallor suffused Monsieur d'Aspremont's face; a red halo circled his eyes; his eyebrows contracted; the fold on his forehead appeared; and his eyes seemed to glisten with a sulphurous light. He half-rose from his seat, clutching convulsively hold of the arms of his mahogany chair. He looked so terrible that D'Altavilla, brave as he was, seized one of the little bifurcated branches of coral on his chain and instinctively directed the points towards Monsieur d'Aspremont. By a supreme effort of will, the latter forced himself to sit down again.

"You are right, sir," he said. "What you mention is the worthy recompense of such an insult, but I will have the patience to wait for a different reparation."

"Believe me," continued the count, "that I have not offered a gentleman an insult which can only be wiped out by blood except for the gravest reasons. I love Miss Alicia Ward."

"What does that matter to me?"

"It matters, indeed, very little to you, for Miss Ward loves you; but I, Count Felipe d'Altavilla, forbid you to see her again."

"I decline to receive any orders from you."

"Of course I knew as much," replied the Neapolitan count; "and I hoped that you would not obey me."

"Then what is your motive for acting in this way?"

"I am convinced that the *fascino* with which you are unhappily afflicted is acting with fatal influence upon Miss Alicia Ward. It is, I daresay, an absurd idea, a prejudice worthy of the Middle Ages, which must seem to you ridiculous in the extreme; but that is a point which I will not discuss with you. Your eyes turn to Miss Ward and dart out upon her, in spite of yourself, that baleful glance which will end by killing her. I have no other means of preventing this unhappy result than by seeking a quarrel with you. In the sixteenth century I should have had you assassinated by one of my mountain-peasants, but such a proceeding is no longer in fashion. I had thought at first of begging you to return to France, but that appeared too naïve.

You would have laughed at the rival who bade you go away and leave him unopposed with your betrothed on the ground of *jettatura*."

While the count was speaking, Paul d'Aspremont felt himself thrilled with a secret horror. It was true then that he,—he, a Christian—was the prey of the powers of hell, and that the evil one glared through his eyes! He scattered death and disaster about him, and his love was fatal! For a moment his reason tottered, and madness flapped its wings against the inner walls of his skull.

"Tell me, count; upon your word of honour, do you believe what you say?" exclaimed D'Aspremont, after a deep reverie of several minutes, which the Neapolitan refrained from interrupting.

"Upon my honour, I do!"

"Then it really is so!" said Paul, in a low voice. "I am a murderer then, a demon, a vampire! I am killing that celestial creature, and breaking the old man's heart!" He was just on the point of promising the count that he would not see Alicia again, but pride and re-awaking jealousy kept back the words that were on his lips. "I will not attempt to hide from you, count," he said, "that I am going from here to see Miss Ward."

"I will not prevent your doing so by violence, as you have just now shown the same consideration for me, but I shall be delighted to meet you at six o'clock to-morrow in the ruins of Pompeii, in the baths, say, where we shall be quite at our ease. What weapon do you prefer? You are the offended party; sword, sabre, or pistol?"

"We will fight with daggers; and we will have our eyes bandaged and be separated by a handkerchief of which we will each hold a corner. We must equalise the chances; I am a *jettatore*, you know, and could kill you by merely looking at you, count!" Paul d'Aspremont then broke out into a strident laugh, pushed open a door and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

ALICIA was in a low-ceilinged room, the walls of which were ornamented with those landscapes in fresco which in Italy take the place of paper. The floor was covered with matting of Manilla straw. The poems of Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow lay on a table covered by a strip of Turkish tapestry ; and a mirror with an old-fashioned frame, and some cane chairs, made up the rest of the furniture. Chinese reed-blinds, pictured over with rocks, pagodas, willows, cranes and dragons, hung in front of the open windows. They were drawn half way up, and allowed a subdued light to filter into the room. A branch of an orange-tree, bright with blossom, and weighed down by the forming fruit, thrust itself familiarly through the window and drooped like a garland over Alicia's head, shaking its perfumed snowy bloom above her. The young girl, who was still feeling unwell, was lying on a narrow couch by the window, raised up by two or three Morocco cushions. The Venetian rug lay discreetly over her feet ; and, arranged in this way, she was ready to receive Paul without in any way infringing the laws of English decorum.

The abstracted girl's book was beginning to slip from her hand ; and her eyes were vaguely wandering beneath their long, silky lashes with a far-off look in them. She was now experiencing that almost voluptuous feeling of languor which follows a febrile attack, and all her energy was expended in nibbling the orange-blossoms, whose sweet perfume soothed and pleased her, and which she picked up from off the rug. Is there not a Venus eating roses by Schiavone ? What a charming companion-piece to the old Venetian's picture a modern artist might have designed if he could have seen Alicia nibbling the orange-blossom ! She was thinking of Monsieur d'Aspremont, and wondering if she would really live to become his wife ; not that she believed at all in the hateful influence of the *jettatura*, but in spite of herself, she was feeling overcome with gloomy presentiments. Dur-

ing the previous night she had had a dream, the painful impression of which lingered with her after she awoke.

She had dreamed that she was lying awake in her bed, her eyes turned towards the door, with a presentiment that someone was going to enter the room. After two or three minutes of anxious waiting, she saw in the gloomy recess of the doorway a slender white shape, which at first seemed transparent, and like a vaporous mist, allowed the objects in the room to be seen through it, but which, as it approached her bed, assumed a more solid consistence. The shadowy form was clad in a muslin robe, the train of which swept the ground. Long spiral curls of black hair, that had come half untwisted, drooped over its pale face, the cheek-bones of which were dyed with two little rosy patches of colour ; the flesh of the neck and bosom was so white that it seemed to melt into the muslin, and it was impossible to say where the one began and the other ended. A slender Venetian necklet circled the slim neck with a narrow band of gold ; the fragile and blue-veined hand held a flower, a tea-rose, the petals of which were falling away and dropping on to the floor like tears.

Alicia had never known her mother, who had died a year after giving her birth, but she had often gazed in deep contemplation at a faded miniature on discoloured ivory that seemed to suggest the portrait of a ghost rather than of a living being ; and she recognised that the shadowy form that had glided into her room was that of her dead mother. The white dress, the necklet, the flower in her hand, the black hair, the hectic glow on the cheeks, nothing was wanting. It was the miniature magnified and developed, animated by life, and moving about. A thrill of love mingled with terror set Alicia's bosom heaving excitedly. She wanted to reach out her arms to the shadowy apparition, but they felt as heavy as marble, and she could not raise them from bed. She tried to speak, but her tongue could only stammer out a few confused syllables. Then the apparition, after placing the tea-rose on the small table, knelt down by the side of the bed and laid her head on Alicia's bosom, listening to the

breathing of her lungs, and counting the beatings of her heart. At the touch of the cold cheek the young girl, terrified at this ghostly examination, felt a sensation of icy chilliness. The apparition at last rose up, cast a mournful glance at the girl, and then, on counting the petals of the rose which were still falling away, exclaimed: "There is only another one left." Then sleep interposed its black veil between the dreaming girl and the vision, and everything vanished into darkness.

Had her mother's soul come to seek her and warn her? What was the meaning of the apparition's mysterious phrase, "There is only another one left"? Was the pale petal-stripped rose a symbol of her life? The strange dream, with its terrors mingled with a soft and tender charm, and the beauteous spectre draped in muslin, and counting the petals of the flower, took entire possession of the young girl's imagination. A melancholy gloom brooded over her fair brow, and vague indefinable presentiments seemed to be flapping their dusky wings about her. This branch of orange blossom that was shaking its flowers above her, had it not, also, a mournful signification? The little virginal stars would never deck her bridal veil! Full of sad thoughts, Alicia took from her lips the flower she was nibbling; it was already yellow and withered.

The hour of Monsieur d'Aspremont's visit was now close at hand. Miss Ward made an effort to drive away her gloomy reflections, twisted her curls with her fingers, straightened the creases out of her muslin wrapper, and took up her book again to occupy her thoughts. Paul soon made his appearance, and Alicia greeted him with a bright look of pleasure, anxious that he should not feel any alarm at finding her lying on the couch, for he would at once have accused himself of being the cause of her illness. The scene which had just taken place between himself and Count d'Altavilla had brought a stern and angry look to his face, which caused Vicè to make the mystic sign with her fingers; but Alicia's loving smile quickly dissipated this look of annoyance.

"You are not ill, I trust," he said, as he sat down by Alicia's

"Oh dear no ; I'm only a little tired. The sirocco was blowing yesterday, and that African wind is always too much for me. You shall see how well I shall be when we get back to Lincolnshire. Now that I am strong again we shall be able to resume our boating on the lake."

Even as she said these words, she could not altogether restrain a little racking cough. Monsieur d'Aspremont turned pale, and averted his eyes. For some minutes neither of them spoke.

"Paul," resumed Alicia presently, taking a plain gold ring from her fragile finger. "I have never given you anything, take this ring and keep it in remembrance of me. I dare say you will be able to wear it, for your fingers are as small as a woman's. Now good-bye, for I am feeling very tired, and I should like to go to sleep. Come and see me again to-morrow."

Paul went away feeling quite heart-broken. Alicia's efforts to hide her illness had been quite in vain. He was distractedly in love with the girl, and he was killing her ! Was not this ring which she had given him a betrothal-ring for another life ? He wandered along the beach in a half mad state, dreaming wildly of rushing away altogether, of immuring himself in a Trappist monastery, and waiting there till death should summon him, without once raising the hood of his robe. He accused himself of baseness and ingratitude for not making a sacrifice of his love, and for allowing himself to take advantage of Alicia's heroism ; for she knew everything, knew that he was a *jettatore* as Count d'Altavilla asserted ; and yet, full of angelic pity for him, she did not repulse him !

"Yes," he said to himself, "this Neapolitan, this handsome count whom she disdains, is really and genuinely in love with her. His passion puts mine to shame. To save her, he has not hesitated to attack me and to provoke me, me, a *jettatore* ; one, that is to say, whom he believes to be as powerful for evil as the very devil. While he spoke to me, his fingers played with his amulets, and the eyes of this celebrated duellist who has left three men lying dead on the field fell before mine !"

Upon returning to the Hôtel de Rome, Paul wrote some letters,

made a will bequeathing everything he had to Alicia, except a legacy to John, and then proceeded to make the preparations rendered necessary by the impending duel. He opened the serge-lined rosewood cases which contained his collection of weapons ; took out swords, pistols, and hunting-knives, and at last found a couple of Corsican daggers, exactly alike, which he had bought with the intention of making presents of them to his friends. The blades were of pure steel, thick near the handle, and tapering in to sharp points. They were damasquined and elaborately mounted, and presented a murderous appearance. Paul also selected three handkerchiefs, and made them up into a parcel with the daggers. Then he bade Scazziga be ready to drive him out into the country very early the next morning.

"God grant," he cried, as he threw himself on to his bed without undressing, "that this combat may make an end of me ! If I have the happiness to fall, Alicia will live !"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE dead city of Pompeii does not awake every morning like the living cities do, and although she has been freed from half of the pall of ashes which has lain over her for so many centuries, she still slumbers on in the midst of her desolation even when night withdraws its shadow. The tourists of every nation who throng her streets during the day-time are still in bed, tired out from previous excursions, and the dawn, as it rises over the ruins of the mummified city, glimmers down on not a single human face. Only the lizards with their quivering tails scale the walls and stray over the disjointed mosaics, heedless of the *cave canem* that is inscribed warningly across the thresholds of the deserted houses, and joyously hailing the rising sun. It is they who have succeeded the ancient citizens in possession, and old Pompeii seems to have been disinterred for their benefit.

On this particular morning, however, the peacefulness of the

dawning day was disturbed, to the great alarm of the lizards, by a strange visitor. A carriage stopped at the end of the Street of the Tombs, and Paul sprang out of it and made his way on foot to the appointed place of meeting. He was in good time, and although his mind was occupied by something very different from archæology, he could not help noticing as he walked along a thousand little details which he would never have observed under ordinary circumstances. The senses, when controlled no longer by the soul, but exercising themselves automatically, sometimes manifest singular powers of perception. Convicts condemned to death notice, as they are being marched to execution, a tiny flower sprouting up from between the chinks of the pavement, a number on the button of a uniform, a mistake in spelling on a sign, or any other trifling detail, which seems to assume an immense importance to them. Monsieur d'Aspremont passed in front of the villa of Diomedes, the tomb of Mammia, the funeral triclinium, the ancient gate of the city, the houses and shops which fringe the Via Consularis, almost without glancing at them; and yet his brain received bright and glowing impressions of these ancient memorials of the utmost distinctness. He saw everything, the fluted columns coated half way up with red or yellow stucco, the frescoes, and the inscriptions on the walls. The announcement in red characters of a house to be let was so firmly impressed in his memory that his lips mechanically repeated the Latin words without attaching any kind of meaning to them.

Was it, then, the thought of the approaching duel that was entirely absorbing Paul's thoughts? No, indeed; he was not even thinking of it; his mind was far away, in the drawing-room at Richmond. He was handing his letter of introduction to the commodore, and Miss Ward was furtively glancing at him. She was dressed in white, and jasmine flowers lay on her hair like stars. How young she was, how beautiful and full of life—then!

The ancient baths are at the end of the Via Consularis, near the Street of Fortune. Monsieur d'Aspremont had no difficulty

in finding them. He entered the vaulted hall, which encloses a tier of recesses formed by pillars of terra-cotta supporting an architrave adorned with sculptured children and foliage. The marble casings, the mosaics, and the bronze tripods have disappeared, and there only remains the splendour of the ancient pillars and the walls that are now as bare as those of a tomb. A stray beam of light wandered through a little window, through which a blue disc of sky could be seen, and fell dancingly upon the broken flags of the pavement. Count d'Altavilla made his appearance a few minutes later. In his hand he held a case of pistols and had a couple of swords under his arm, for he had not been able to believe that Monsieur d'Aspremont's propositions had been seriously made; he had fancied that they were merely a piece of Mephistophelian raillery and devilish sarcasm.

"What are these pistols and swords for, count?" asked Paul, on seeing his adversary's supply of weapons. "Did we not agree upon quite another manner of conducting our duel?"

"Certainly we did; but I thought that perhaps you might change your mind. No one ever heard of men fighting in such a fashion before."

"Were our skill equal, my peculiar position puts me at too great an advantage over you," replied Paul with a bitter smile, "and I don't wish to make an unfair use of it. Here are the daggers which I have brought with me; examine them; they are exactly alike. Here, too, are some handkerchiefs to bind our eyes. They are thick ones you see, and my gaze cannot pierce them." Count d'Altavilla made a sign of acquiescence. "We have no witnesses," continued Paul, "and one or the other of us is destined not to leave this ruin alive. Let us each write a little note bearing testimony to the loyalty of the duel, and the conqueror shall place it on the dead man's breast."

"A very proper precaution!" replied the Neapolitan with a smile, writing a few lines on the page which Paul tore out of his pocket-book, and on which the young Frenchman himself subsequently inscribed something similar.

After this formality was completed, the two adversaries took off their coats, bandaged their eyes, grasped their daggers, while each laid hold of an end of the handkerchief, the terrible bond of union between the animosity of each against the other.

"Are you ready?" asked Monsieur d'Aspremont of the Count d'Altavilla.

"Yes," replied the count in a perfectly calm voice.

Count d'Altavilla was a man of proved valour. There was nothing in the world that he was afraid of, except *jettatura*; and this blind-fold combat, which would have made almost any other man shake with fear, did not trouble him not at all. He was constantly risking his life in this way, and he was spared the unpleasantness of seeing his adversary's fierce eyes shooting out their evil glance at him. The two combatants brandished their daggers, and the handkerchief which joined them together in the darkness which surrounded them was tightly strained. Paul and the count had instinctively thrown the upper parts of their bodies back, that being the only mystery of defence possible in this strange duel, and their arms descended without striking anything save empty space. There was something very horrible in this fight in the dark, when each combatant felt that death was pressing him close at hand though he could not see its approach. The two adversaries stepped back in stern silence, turned about, sprang forward, jostling each other now and then, but always exceeding or falling short of their mark. Not a sound was to be heard save the pattering of their feet and the panting of their breath. Once D'Altavilla felt the point of his dagger strike against something. He stood motionless for a moment, thinking he had slain his rival, and waiting to hear his body fall; but he had only struck the wall!

"Ah, I thought I had pierced right through you," he exclaimed, putting himself on his guard again.

"Don't speak," said Paul, "your voice guides me."

Then the combat recommenced. Suddenly the two adver-

saries found themselves separated. A blow from Paul's dagger had severed the handkerchief.

"A truce!" exclaimed the Neapolitan. "The handkerchief is cut, and we are no longer connected.

"What does that matter? Let us fight on!" said Paul.

There was now a grim silence. Like honourable enemies, neither Monsieur d'Aspremont nor the count wished to profit by the indications as to their position which their exchange of words had afforded them. They took a few steps to confuse themselves, and then each began to search for the other in the dark. Monsieur d'Aspremont's foot at last displaced a pebble, and the slight sound thus caused informed the Neapolitan, who was striking with his dagger at random, in what direction he should step. Bracing himself up to get a better spring, D'Altavilla leapt forward with the impetuosity of a tiger, and came into collision with Monsieur d'Aspremont's dagger. Paul touched the point of his weapon, and felt that it was wet. Tottering steps now sounded heavily over the stones underfoot; a deep sigh broke through the darkness, and a body fell to the ground in a heap. Seized with horror, Paul tore off the bandage which covered his eyes, and beheld Count d'Altavilla lying on his back, pale and motionless, with a large crimson stain on his shirt just over his heart. The handsome Neapolitan was dead! Monsieur d'Aspremont laid the paper bearing witness to the loyalty of the duel on D'Altavilla's breast, and then hastened away from the ancient baths, looking paler in the full glare of the day than did the criminal whom Proudhon depicts as being pursued under the light of the moon by avenging Furies.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABOUT two o'clock in the afternoon a party of English tourists, conducted by a guide, visited the ruins of Pompeii. The detachment of islanders, composed of father and mother, three

tall daughters, two little sons, and a cousin, had already—with a cold glaucous gaze, in which one plainly read that feeling of profound boredom which is such an essentially British characteristic—scanned the amphitheatre, the tragic and operatic theatres, placed in such curious juxtaposition; the military quarters, scrawled over with the caricatures which the sentries had drawn to while away the time; the Forum, overwhelmed while it was undergoing repairs; the basilica; the temples of Venus and Jupiter; the Pantheon and the neighbouring shops. The party silently followed in their Murray the guide's verbose descriptions, and gave scarcely a glance at the columns, the fragmentary statues, the mosaics, frescoes, and inscriptions.

At last they reached the ancient baths, discovered, as the guide informed them, in 1824. "Here were the stoves, and the boiler for heating the water; further on was the hall of lesser heat." These details, given in the Neapolitan dialect mingled with several English expressions, seemed to have but slight interest for the visitors, who were already turning round to depart, when Miss Geraldine, the eldest of the girls, a tall young lady with pale tow-like hair, and a complexion spotted with reddish speckles, sprang a couple of steps backwards with a half-shocked, half-frightened air, and cried out, "A man!"

"It must be one of the exploring gang who has chosen the place for his siesta; for it is both cool and shady beneath this vault. Don't be frightened, miss," said the guide, as with his foot he pushed the body lying prone on the ground. "Come, I say, you idle fellow, get up, and let their excellencies pass on."

The supposed sleeper lay perfectly still.

"He isn't asleep, he's dead," said one of the two youths, who, from his small stature, was better able to observe the appearance of the body in the gloom.

The guide stooped down over the corpse, and then sprang sharply up again with a horrified expression. "An assassination," he exclaimed.

"Really, how extremely unpleasant to find one's self confronted by such sights!" cried Mrs Bracebridge. "Go away,

Geraldine and Kitty and Bessy ; this isn't at all a fitting sight for young people like you to look at. Are there no police in this country ? The coroner ought to have had the body removed."

"There's a paper !" laconically remarked the cousin, who was lanky and stiff, and seemed embarrassed with his own person, like Dumbiedikes in "The Heart of Midlothian."

"Yes, indeed," said the guide, taking up the note that had been placed on D'Altavilla's breast, "here's a paper with something written on it."

"Read it !" exclaimed the islanders in chorus, their curiosity being now highly excited.

"Let no inquiries be made and no one interfered with on account of my death. If this note is found on my wound, I shall have fallen in a fair duel.—*Signed*—FELIPE, COUNT D'ALTAVILLA."

"He was a person of importance, then ! What a sad pity !" sighed Mrs Bracebridge, upon whom the count's rank had made an impression.

"And very handsome, too !" murmured Geraldine, the young lady with freckles, in a low voice.

"You can't complain any longer now of the monotony of our travels," said Bessy to Kitty. "It is true that we have not been captured by brigands on the road between Terracina and Fondi ; but a young nobleman stabbed with a dagger in the ruins of Pompeii, there's an adventure for you ! I've no doubt there's some rivalry in love at the bottom of it ; at anyrate, we have now got something quite Italian, and picturesque and romantic, to relate to our friends. I will make a sketch of the scene for my album, and you can write me some mysterious verses under it.

"It's all up with him," now said the guide ; "the blow was well delivered, with a downward stroke, in the most scientific way. There's nothing more to be said."

Such was the funeral oration pronounced over the count. The guide mentioned the matter to some workmen, who informed the police, and poor D'Altavilla's body was taken off to his home near Salerno.

After leaving the baths, Paul d'Aspremont had regained his carriage with his eyes staring widely open like a somnambulist's, but seeing nothing. He looked like a walking statue. Although at the sight of the corpse he had felt thrilled with that feeling of awe and horror which death inspires, he in no way looked upon himself as guilty, and there was no remorse mingled with his despair. Having received a provocation which did not allow him to avoid fighting, he had only entered upon this duel in the hope that it would be the means of ridding himself of a life which had become odious to him. Endowed with a baleful gaze, he had wished the combat to be fought blindfold, so that chance alone should be responsible for its result. His hand had not even struck the fatal blow; his enemy had transfixed himself on to his steel! He grieved for Count d'Altavilla as though he himself had been altogether a stranger to his death.

"It is my dagger that has killed him," he said to himself; "but if I had looked at him in a ball-room a chandelier would have fallen from the ceiling and knocked his brains out. I am as innocent as the thunderbolt, as the avalanche, as all the unconscious destructive forces of nature. Never was my will maleficent; my heart only breathes love and kindness, but yet I know that I am a source of destruction to my fellows. The thunderbolt knows not that it slays; but I am a man, an intelligent creature, and have I not a duty to fulfil in respect of myself? I must cite myself before my own tribunal, and examine myself. Can I remain on this earth, where I cause nothing but evil? Would God damn me if I were to kill myself for the sake of my fellows? It is a terrible and profound question which I dare not resolve; but it seems to me that, in the position in which I am placed, voluntary death is excusable. But what if I am mistaken? I should be shut out through all eternity from

the sight of Alicia, when my gaze could do her no harm, for there is no *fascino* in the eyes of the soul. That is a risk which I dare not run."

An idea suddenly flashed through the brain of the unhappy *jettatore*, and interrupted his mental soliloquy. His features relaxed, and the deep serenity which results from high resolutions smoothed away the wrinkles from his pale brow. He had come to a supreme determination.

"Be condemned to darkness, eyes of mine, since you see but to kill. However before I close you for ever, saturate yourselves with the light; gaze upon the sun, the blue sky, the boundless sea, the purple mountain-chains, the green trees, the melting horizon, the colonnades of the palaces, the huts of the fishermen, the distant islands in the bay, the white sails skimming over the deep, Vesuvius with its tuft of smoke; look well at them so that you may remember all these fair sights which you will see no more; study each form and tint; give yourselves a last feast to-day, whether you be harmful or not, you may fix yourselves freely on everything; intoxicate yourselves with the splendid spectacle of creation. Go, now, and glut yourselves with the scene before you! The curtain is about to fall between you and the glories of the universe!"

The carriage was now skirting the shore; the sparkling bay was glittering in the sun; the sky seemed formed of one huge sapphire, and everything seemed rejoicing in a glorious beauty. Paul told Scazziga to stop, and then got out of the carriage, and sat down on a rock and gazed around him for a long, long time, as though he wished to absorb infinity in his vision. His eyes bathed themselves in light and space, rolled about as though he were in an ecstasy, saturated themselves with the glowing colours, and drank in the sunshine. There would be no aurora for him in the night that was coming. At last tearing himself away from this silent contemplation, Paul d'Aspremont got into his carriage again, and bade Scazziga drive him to Miss Ward's.

She was lying, as on the previous day, on the narrow couch

in the low room which we have already described. Paul went and stood in front of her, and this time he did not keep his eyes bent upon the ground, as he had made a point of doing ever since he had become conscious of his *jettatura*. Alicia's perfect beauty had become spiritualized by suffering. The woman had almost disappeared, to give place to the angel. Her flesh was transparent, ethereal, and luminous. Her soul could be seen shining through her body like the glow of the flame in an alabaster lamp. Her eyes seemed infinitely deep like the heavens, and glistened like the stars; while the red signature of life was scarcely visible in the faded coral of her lips. Her mouth was lighted up by a divine smile, like a sunbeam playing on a rosebud, when she saw her lover's gaze enveloping her with a long caress. She believed that Paul had at last freed himself of his saddening belief in *jettatura*, and had come back to her confident and happy as in the days when they had first known each other. She stretched out to him her pale and fragile little hand, which he retained in his own.

"You're not afraid of me, then, now?" she said, with a gentle playfulness, to Paul, who was still keeping his eyes fixed upon her.

"Oh, let me look at you!" replied Paul d'Aspremont in a soft but singular tone of voice as he knelt down by the side of the couch; "let me intoxicate myself with this ineffable beauty!"

He now gazed greedily at Alicia's lustrous black hair, her lovely brow, pure as a Grecian statue's, her eyes of deepest blue, like the dark azure of a fair night, her delicately chiselled nose, her mouth, whose languid smile half-revealed her pearly teeth, and her sinuous swan-like neck; and he seemed to be taking careful note of every feature, and detail, and beauty, like an artist desirous of painting a portrait from memory. His gaze hovered lingeringly over the adored face, storing up a hoard of recollections, and impressing every line and curve upon his mind. Alicia, fascinated and charmed by this ardent gaze, felt a painfully pleasurable sensation, a thrill of sweet agony.

Her life seemed to be soaring up and then fainting away. She grew flushed and pale alternately, and was cold one moment and burning with fever the next. Had it lasted a minute longer, her soul had surely quitted her body. She laid her hand on Paul's eyes, but the young man's gaze darted like a flame through her transparent and fragile fingers.

"Now my eyes may be darkened," he said, rising up from his knees: "I shall see her for evermore in my heart."

After having watched the sun set that evening, the last time he would ever see it sink to rest, Paul d'Aspremont returned to the Hôtel de Rome, and ordered a brazier and some charcoal to be taken into his room.

"Does he want to suffocate himself, I wonder?" Virgilio Falsacappa said to himself as he gave John what his master required; "it would be the best thing the accursed *jettatore* could do!"

Alicia's lover opened the window, thus falsifying Falsacappa's conjecture, lighted the charcoal, and plunged the blade of a dagger into the midst of it, and then waited for it to grow red-hot. The slender blade soon reached a white heat in the midst of the glowing charcoal; and Paul, as though to say good-bye to himself, leaned his elbows on the mantelpiece in front of the large mirror which reflected the brightness of a chandelier lighted up with numerous wax candles. He gazed for some minutes with a melancholy curiosity at the spectral-looking being who was himself, at that envelope of his soul which he was soon to see no more.

"Farewell, pale phantom which I have dragged about with me through so many years of life; farewell, thou imperfect and sinister form, thou earthy shape branded on the brow with the brand of death, sorrow-racked mask of a loving tender soul. Thou art going to vanish from my sight for ever. Now, in the full flush of life, I will plunge thee into eternal darkness, and soon I shall have forgotten thee like a dream of some wild stormy night. In vain, thou accursed body, wilt thou plead 'Oh, spare mine eyes, Hubert!' to my inflexible resolve, for

thou wilt never bend it. Come, now, to your task, victim and executioner at once !”

Then he left the mantelpiece, and sat down on the edge of his bed. He blew the charcoal in the brazier, which he had placed upon a small table near at hand, into a glow with his lips, and then he grasped hold of the handle of the dagger, and drew out the blade, from which white hot sparks fell off with a crackling sound. At this supreme moment, in spite of all his resolution, Paul d'Aspremont felt something like a weakness of purpose. A cold perspiration bathed his brow ; but he quickly overcame his temporary hesitation, which was entirely physical, and moved the glowing steel towards his eyes. A sharp, piercing and intolerable spasm of pain extorted a cry from him. Two streams of molten lead seemed to be forcing their way through the sockets of his eyes to the interior of his skull ; and he let the dagger fall on to the ground, where it left a brown mark on the floor. A thick opaque darkness, compared with which the blackest night were brilliant light, shrouded him with its ebon mantle. He turned his face towards the mantelpiece, on which the candles were still burning, but he could see nothing but dense impenetrable darkness, unbroken even by the vague quivering gleams which are visible through the closed eyelids of one who is standing in front of a light. The sacrifice was consummated !

“Now, noble and charming creature,” said Paul, “I can become your husband without being a murderer. You need no longer perish heroically beneath my fatal gaze. You will recover all your glow of vigorous health ; though, alas ! I shall never see it : but your heavenly image will shine with an immortal brilliance in my recollection. I shall see you with my soul's eye ; I shall hear your voice that is more full of harmony than the sweetest music ; I shall feel the motion of the air as you move through it ; my ears will seize the silken rustle of your dress, and the slightest creak of your shoes ; and my nostrils will drink in the soft perfume that floats round you like an atmosphere. Sometimes you will let your hand rest in mine to

convince me of your presence, and you will deign to guide your poor blind husband when his feet may hesitate in his darksome path ; you will read the verses of the poets to him, and you will describe the pictures and the statuary. Through your lips the vanished universe will be restored to him. You will be his sole thought, his sole dream. Shut off from the material world and blinded to the light, his soul will ever fly towards you on never-wearying pinions ! Since you are saved, I regret nothing. What, indeed, have I lost ? The monotonous spectacle of the days and seasons, the sight of decorations more or less picturesque, in which are set out the hundred different acts of the sad human comedy ! The earth, sky, sea, and rivers, the mountains, trees, and flowers ; they are but vain phantoms, wearisome repetitions, things that are always the same. When one has love, one has the real sun, the light which never fades away ! ”

Thus mentally soliloquized the unhappy Paul d'Aspremont, fevered with a poetic exaltation of mind not altogether unmingled with a delirium caused by his acute pain. Gradually the spasms of his anguish calmed down, and he fell into a deep sleep, the twin-brother of death, and as powerful to console. When the light of day streamed into his room, it did not awaken him. Noon and midnight would henceforth seem the same to him ; however, the bells joyfully pealing out the *angelus* sounded vaguely in his slumbering ears, and gradually growing more distinct awoke him from his sleep. He raised his eyelids, and, before his mind recovered a recollection of what had happened, he sustained a most painful shock. His eyes opened on a blank, upon black nothingness. It was as though he had been buried alive, and had awoken from a lethargy to find himself fast closed in his coffin. But he quickly recovered himself, however. It would be like this for evermore, and every morning he could pass from the darkness of slumber to the darkness of night ! He groped about for the bell-rope, and having pulled it, John hastened into the room in answer to the summons. He manifested his astonishment at seeing his

master rise from his bed with the uncertain movements of a blind man.

"I imprudently went to sleep with the window open," said Paul, wishing to avoid all questioning, "and I'm afraid I've contracted a *gutta serena*, but I shall be all right again by and by, I daresay. Lead me to my chair, and put a glass of cold water by my side."

John, who was possessed of a perfect English discretion, executed his master's orders without making any remark, and then left the room. Left to himself, Paul now soaked his handkerchief in the cold water, and then applied it to his eyes to cool the sensation of heat caused by the burning steel. However, let us now leave Paul d'Aspremont for a few moments in his suffering motionlessness, and occupy ourselves for a little while with the other characters in this story.

The news of Count d'Altavilla's mysterious death quickly circulated through Naples, and was made the subject of a thousand conjectures, one more wild than another. The count's skill as a swordsman was notorious; he was considered one of the best fencers of that Neapolitan school which inspires such fear on the duelling-ground. He had killed three opponents, and had severely wounded five or six others. His renown in this respect was so well established, that he had quite ceased to engage in duels. The most braggart duellists saluted him politely; and, even if he had looked askance at them, would have avoided seeking a cause of offence. If any one of these swaggerers had killed D'Altavilla, he certainly would not have failed to take all advantage of the distinction. The supposition of assassination seemed the only one left, but that was negatived by the paper found on the dead man's breast. Its authenticity was disputed at first, but the count's writing was identified by persons who had received more than a hundred letters from him. The circumstance of the bandaged eyes, for the handkerchief was still tied round the count's head when his corpse was discovered, appeared quite inexplicable. In addition to the dagger that was thrust in the dead man's body, a second one

had been discovered, which people supposed had slipped from his dying grasp. But, it was contended, if the duel had been fought with daggers, what was the meaning of the swords and pistols which were recognised as belonging to the count, whose coachman asserted that he had driven his master to Pompeii, with the order to return home if the latter did not reappear within an hour. The whole affair was quite inexplicable.

The report of the count's death quickly reached Vicè's ears, and she informed Sir Joshua Ward of it. The commodore, whose mind immediately reverted to the mysterious conversation which D'Altavilla had had with him regarding Alicia, vaguely suspected some secret attack, some terrible and desperate conflict into which Paul d'Aspremont had found himself drawn, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Vicè herself had no hesitation whatever in attributing the handsome count's death to the wicked *jettatore*; her hatred for the latter prompted her at once to this conclusion. Paul d'Aspremont, however, had paid his visit to Miss Ward at his wonted hour, and his appearance showed no signs of his having been engaged in such a terrible drama; in point of fact he had appeared even calmer than usual.

The count's death was concealed from Alicia, whose condition was now causing great anxiety, although the English physician whom Sir Joshua had summoned could not detect the symptoms of any definite disease. The girl's life simply seemed to be ebbing away; it was as though her soul was preening its wings in readiness to take flight; and she appeared rather like a bird that is being gradually suffocated in the receiver of an air-pump than as suffering from any definite malady which it was possible to treat by ordinary methods. She seemed like an angel, held captive on earth, and longing to return to her home in heaven.

Paul d'Aspremont did not come that day. Desiring to conceal his sacrifice, he did not wish to appear with reddened eyes, meaning to account for his sudden blindness by a very different reason than the real one. The next day feeling quite

free from pain, he got into his carriage with John's assistance. The horses drew up as usual in front of the garden-gate. The voluntarily blinded man pushed it open; and, feeling his way carefully with his feet, he passed along the well-known path. Vicè did not hasten to meet him according to her wont when she heard the bell set in motion by the opening of the gate; and not a single one of the joyful little sounds which indicate the respiration of a living house reached Paul's straining ear. A deep, mournful alarming silence lay over the place as though it were deserted. This silence, which would have had a depressing effect upon one who could see clearly, seemed still more mournful in the gloomy darkness which enwrapped the recently blinded Paul. The branches which he could no longer see seemed to be endeavouring to hold him back with beseeching arms, and to be trying to prevent his further progress. The laurels barred his way; the rose-trees clutched hold of his clothes; the trailing plants entangled themselves round his legs; and the whole garden seemed to be saying to him with its silent tongue:

"Unhappy man, what do you want here? Do not attempt to break through the obstacles with which I am opposing your steps, but take yourself away!"

Paul, however, turned a deaf ear to all this mute pleading; and, tortured by terrible presentiments, he thrust himself through the foliage, forced asunder the masses of verdure, and broke off the branches, in his determined advance towards the house. Torn and scratched by the perverse boughs, he at last succeeded in reaching the end of the pathway. A breath of free air puffed against his face, and he continued his progress, feeling his way with his hands before his face. Presently he reached the house, and groped about to find the door. He entered; but no kindly voice bade him welcome. Hearing no sound to guide him, he stood hesitating for some moments on the threshold. A smell of ether, aromatic scents, the odour of burning wax, and all the other vague perfumes of the chamber of death, swept up the nostrils of the blind man who was now panting with terror.

A hideous thought flashed across Paul's mind, and he felt his way into the room. After taking a few steps, he stumbled against something which fell to the ground with a loud noise. He stooped down, and recognised by his touch that it was a tall metal candlestick, such as one sees in churches, containing a long taper. Distracted, he now pursued his way through the darkness. He fancied he could hear a voice murmuring prayers in whispered tones. He took another step forward, and his hands touched the edge of a bed. He stooped down, and his trembling fingers first lighted upon a rigid and motionless body wrapped in a robe of delicate material ; then upon a wreath of roses, and a face that was smooth and cold as marble. It was Alicia lying dead.

"Dead," shrieked Paul, with a choking rattle in his throat ; "dead ; and it is I who have killed her !"

The commodore, frozen with horror, had seen this phantom with the darkened eyes totter into the room, and wander about at random till chance had brought him to the bed whereon his niece lay dead ; and he understood everything at once. The greatness of the futile sacrifice made two huge tears well up in the reddened eyes of the old man, who had thought that he had for ever lost the power of weeping. Paul threw himself on his knees by the bed-side, and covered Alicia's icy hand with kisses ; and his whole body was shaken by a storm of convulsive sobs. His grief softened even the fierce Vicè, who was standing silent and mournful by the wall, keeping watch over her mistress's last sleep.

When his mute farewell was taken, Paul d'Aspremont rose to his feet again, and stiffly groped his way to the door, like a piece of mechanism moved by clock-work. There was a supernatural expression in his fixed and staring eyes, with dull pupils ; and, blinded though they were, they looked as though they saw. He passed through the garden with a heavy gait, as though he were a marble ghost, and strode off straight before him into the open country, knocking aside the pebbles with his feet, sometimes stumbling, and ever straining his ears as

though he were trying to catch some distant sound, while he advanced.

The sonorous voice of the sea grew more and more distinct. The waves, excited by a stormy wind, broke on the shore with a sound of mighty sobs that seemed like the expression of some mysterious grief; and their heaving bosoms swelled out beneath their curling fringes of foam. Millions of bitter tears streamed down over the rocks, and the uneasy gulls broke out into plaintive cries.

Paul soon reached a rock which overhung the sea. The uproar of the breakers, and the salt spray which the sweeping wind tore from the waves and swept in his face must have warned him of his danger; but he took no heed. A strange smile stiffened his pale lips, and he continued his fatal progress, though he felt that his foot was hanging suspended over empty space. He fell. A mighty wave seized him, and swept him upwards for a few moments in its curving arch, and then engulfed him. The storm now burst in fury. The long waves charged ceaselessly against the shore like warriors advancing to the assault, hurling masses of foam fifty feet high into the air. The black clouds were riven like the walls of hell, and the purple glare of the lightning flashed through the fissures; blinding sulphureous gleams lighted up the wide extent of the sea; the summit of Vesuvius was reddened with a lurid glow, and a tuft of gloomy smoke, which the wind flattened down, floated tremulously over the brow of the volcano. The boats at their moorings dashed against each other with mournfully sounding shocks, and their tightly strained cordage creaked dismally. Soon the rain began to stream down, whistling through the air like a ceaseless flight of arrows. It seemed almost as though chaos had come again, and had overwhelmed the elements once more with confusion.

Paul d'Aspremont's body was never found, though search was made for it by the commodore's directions. An ebony coffin with brass mountings, lined with buttoned silk, was embarked on a yacht under the commodore's careful supervision, and was

subsequently buried in the family vault in Lincolnshire. It contained the mortal remains of Alicia Ward, lovely even in death.

A remarkable change has taken place in the commodore's appearance. His glorious plumpness of person has disappeared. He no longer mixes rum with his tea ; he merely nibbles at his food, and scarcely says a couple of words in a day. The vivid contrast between his white whiskers and crimson face is a thing of the past—for the commodore has become pale !

THE END.



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